

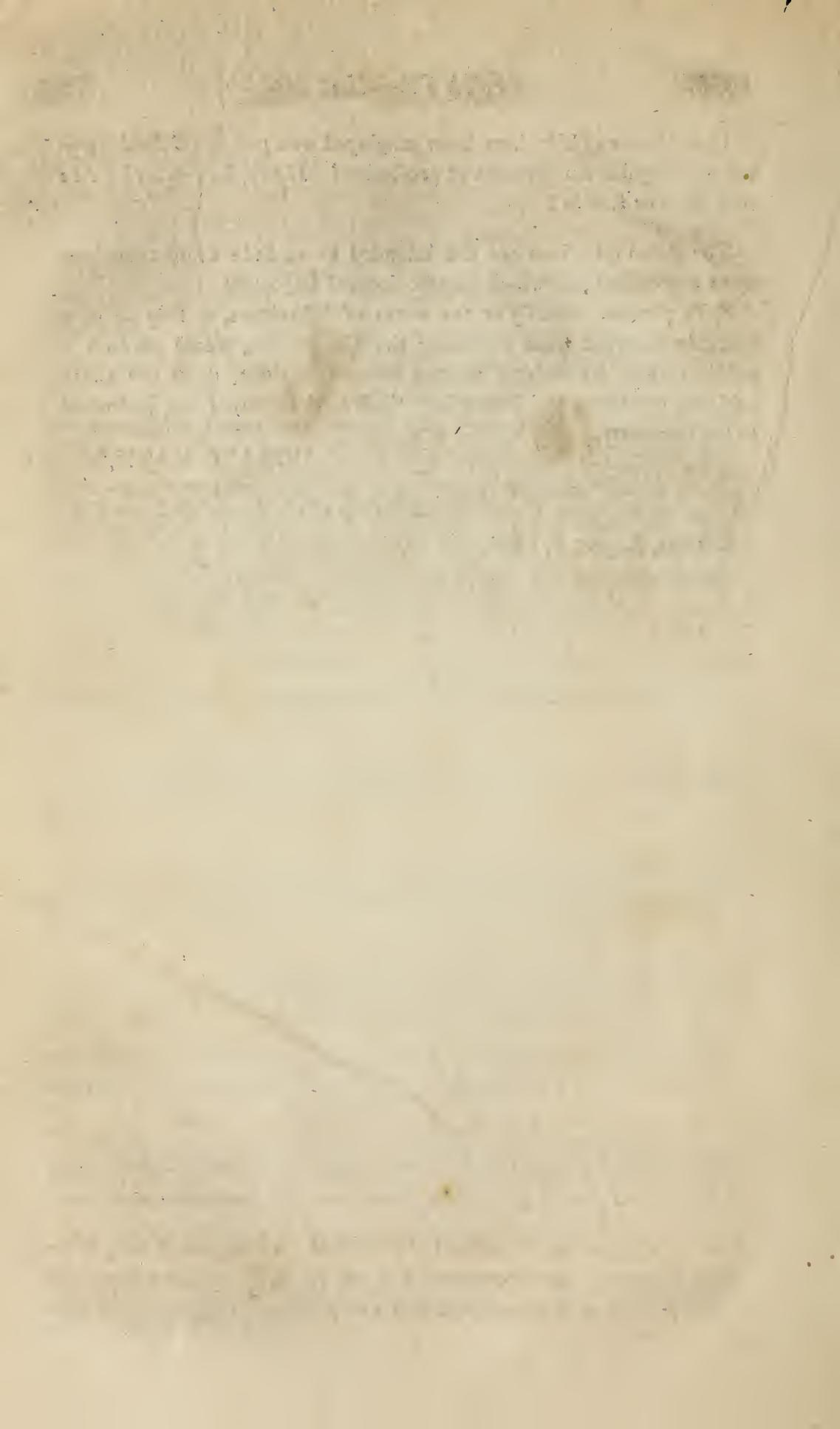
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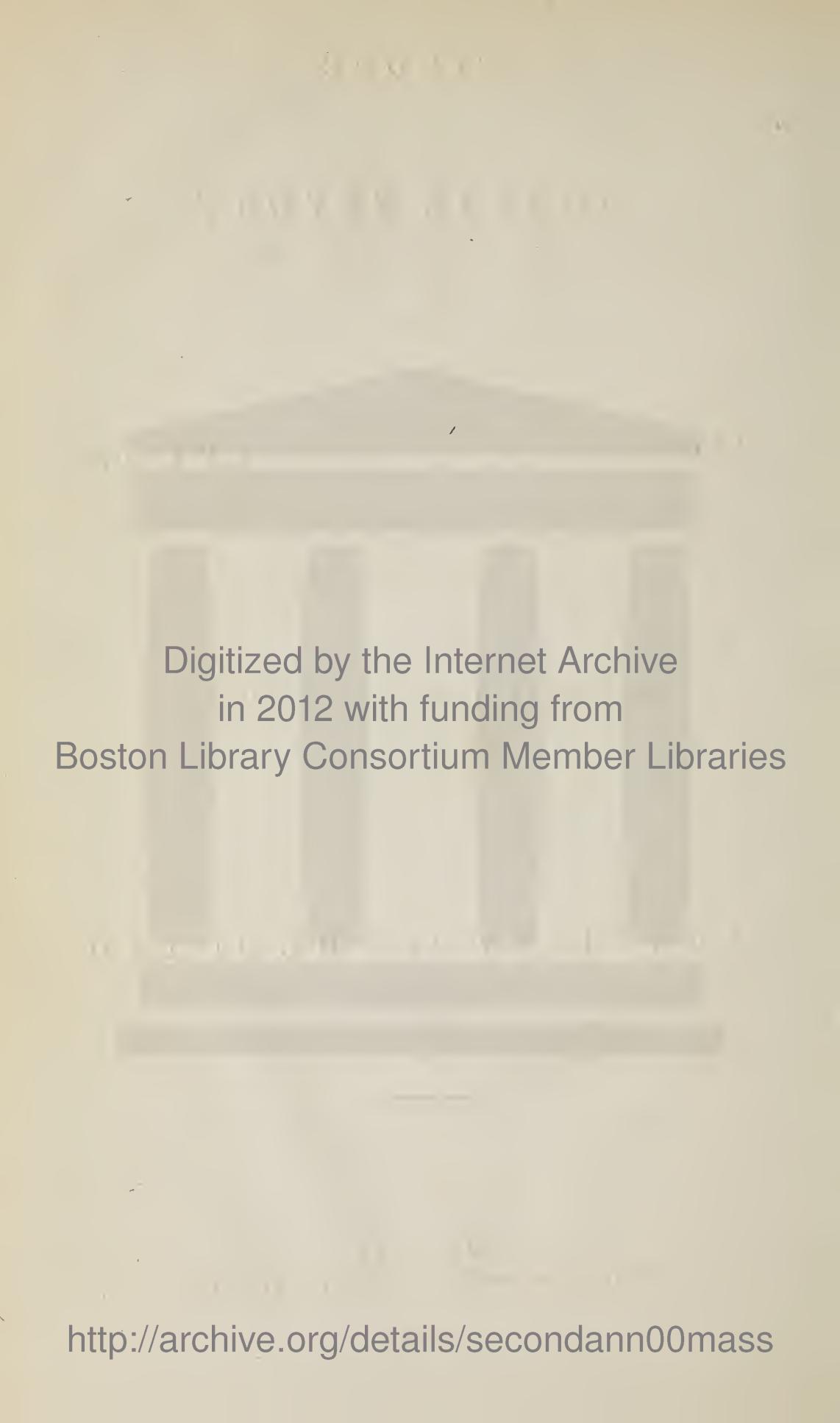
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B o s t o n :
DUTTON AND WENTWORTH, STATE PRINTERS.

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1839.

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Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

HON. MYRON LAWRENCE,
President of the Senate,

SIR,—Agreeably to the provisions of the Act of 20th April, 1837, I transmit herewith to the Legislature the Second Annual Report of the Board of Education, together with the Second Annual Report of the Secretary of the Board.

I have the honor to be,

With the highest respect,

Your obedient servant,

EDWARD EVERETT,

Chairman of the Board of Education.

BOSTON, 14th January, 1839.

SECOND ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
BOARD OF EDUCATION.

The Board of Education, in conformity with the provisions of the Act of 20th April, 1837, establishing the board, beg leave to submit to the Legislature their Second Annual Report.

In their first Annual Report, it was stated, that, in the absence of specific powers to undertake measures for the improvement of the schools of the Commonwealth, the Board had been led to seek the voluntary co-operation of the friends of education ; and, as the best mode of obtaining this co-operation, had invited them to meet the Secretary of the Board, in convention in the several counties of the Commonwealth.

It is a matter of great satisfaction to the Board, that the Legislature should have indicated its approval of this measure by making it the duty of the Secretary, annually to attend a meeting in each county, of all such teachers of public schools, members of school Committees of the several towns, and friends of education generally, as may voluntarily assemble at the time and place designated by the Board of Education.

This duty has been performed agreeably to law, during the past season, in all the counties of the State. The

meetings have been attended, in all cases, by the Secretary, and by those members of the Board whose other engagements permitted them to be present, and generally by a large number of the friends of education. An address on the most interesting topics connected with Education, on the measures recently adopted by the Legislature for its improvement, and on the defects and evils existing in our system of education and their remedies, was delivered by the Secretary at each of these conventions, with general acceptance, and as the Board confidently believe with very happy effect. A more detailed account of these meetings does not fall directly within the province of the Board; but they beg leave to remark, that they regard the county conventions, sanctioned by the Act of the Legislature of the 21st of April, 1838, as likely to produce, by a gradual and steady operation a most desirable effect upon the public mind. It is not to be expected, that at any one, or any number of these conventions, in any given year, decided results and measures of an imposing and brilliant character should be originated. The cause of education, in free governments, does not admit the production of such results, by violent and transient impulses of public sentiment. But we may reasonably hope for the happiest effects from conventions of this character, held under the direct sanction of the Legislature, once in every year, and in every county of the Commonwealth, by an invitation addressed to all who feel an interest in the formation of the minds and hearts of the young, — an invitation transcending all the party lines, which divide the feelings and judgments of men on other important subjects. The meetings, conducted as they are believed, in all cases, to have been in perfect harmony, have usually been attend-

ed by some of the most respected citizens in the several counties, and will prove, it is hoped, with each succeeding year, still more interesting ; and still more important, as an occasion of collecting and diffusing information on this great topic of common concern.

The subject of schools for teachers has for several years, received a considerable share of the attention of the friends of education in the Commonwealth, and has, on many occasions, been favorably considered by the Committees on Education of the two Houses. The Board of Education, in their former Annual Report, presented the subject to the notice of the Legislature. In the course of the last winter, a communication was addressed, by the Secretary of the Board, to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, stating that the sum of ten thousand dollars had been placed at his disposal, by a friend of education, on condition that the Commonwealth would appropriate the same amount ; the sum to be disbursed, under the direction of the Board of Education, in qualifying teachers for common schools. The donation was promptly accepted by the Legislature on the condition named, and the sum of ten thousand dollars was appropriated to the object specified, by a joint Resolve, approved on the 19th April, 1838.)

By this joint act of public and private liberality, the Board found themselves clothed with a trust of equal importance and delicacy. It was evidently the object of this provision, that the practicability and usefulness of institutions for the education of teachers should be brought to the test of experiment ; and the success of this experiment was likely to have a powerful influence over public opinion in the Commonwealth, on this impor-

tant subject. The particular form, in which the experiment should be made and all the details of the institution or institutions to be established, were left to the discretion of the Board of Education. Neither the individual donation nor the Resolve of the Legislature was accompanied by any specifications on this head. This consideration imposed upon the Board the necessity of proceeding with caution. They felt it an incumbent duty not to hazard the success of this important measure, by any false step hastily taken in the outset. Feeling that institutions for the formation of teachers were relied upon by many intelligent friends of education, as the most important means of improving the character of our common schools,—while the mass of the community were perhaps waiting, with opinions yet undecided, the sure teachings of experience on this subject,—the Board felt that more than usual responsibility rested upon them, for a cautious application of the fund placed at their disposal.

This course was rendered still more necessary, by the want of previously established institutions of the kind in this country, which might serve as a guide. Attempts have been made, it is understood, with considerable success in a sister State, to connect some provision for the formation of teachers, with regular Academical Institutions; but the Board are not aware that Normal schools, properly so called, have as yet been established in any part of the Union. They exist in great numbers in those parts of Europe, where the greatest attention has been paid to the subject of education, and they are regarded as highly important parts of the system of public instruction; but the condition of our country differs so greatly from that of Europe, in reference to the demand for teachers, and their compensation,—to the resources for

the support of public institutions and to the authorities, by which they are to be established, that it rarely is practicable to imitate, to any great extent, the details of European establishments. It is not often either possible or desirable, to do more than derive useful hints from their institutions for the organization or modifications of ours.

One of the first questions that presented itself for the consideration of the Board, was, whether the whole sum placed at their disposal should be expended upon a single experiment, or whether more than one institution should be put in operation at the same time, in different parts of the Commonwealth. After mature deliberation, the latter course was decided upon. Although, as has been already observed, the terms of the Resolve contained no direction to the Board in this or any other respect, yet it was thought that the Legislature, in the language employed, intimated a preference to the most extensive measures, which the nature of the case, and the means at command, admitted. The fund was to be "expended in qualifying teachers for the common schools of Massachusetts." Had the Legislature contemplated the establishment simply of a single institution,—of one Normal school,—it was supposed that such a purpose would have been made more apparent by some terms of limitation in their Resolve.

It was further considered that the sum of money at the disposition of the Board, though reflecting the greatest credit on the public and private munificence by which it was furnished, was evidently not to be regarded as a permanent endowment. No authority was given for its investment; nor would it, if invested in buildings, fixtures, a library, and an apparatus, have left a fund adequate to the salaries of teachers even for a single institu-

tion It was at the same time, fully sufficient for the establishment of several Normal schools in different parts of the Commonwealth, provided with means for carrying on a fair experiment in the education of teachers, for a sufficient length of time to bring the usefulness of such institutions to the test of experience. The Board had the means of knowing, that such a distribution of the fund was approved by the individual, whose liberal provision had been accepted by the Legislature, as it appeared to them, as has been observed, to meet the views, rather intimated than distinctly set forth, in the Resolve of the General Court, and the report of the Committee on Education of the House of Representatives, with which the Resolve originated.

It was accordingly decided by the Board to establish three or four Normal schools in different parts of the Commonwealth ; as soon as arrangements could be made for the purpose. It was supposed that the sum of twenty thousand dollars, with the assistance which might be expected from the friends of education, in a manner which will be presently spoken of, would be sufficient to put in operation and to sustain for three years, at least, this number of Normal schools in different parts of the State, and thus bring fairly within the reach of the people the means of partaking their advantages and estimating their usefulness, with a view to the question of their final adoption or rejection as a constituent part of the system of school education. The Board would have been glad to go further, and to make arrangements for establishing a Normal school in every county of the Commonwealth, but the funds at their disposal evidently made this impossible. It was their duty, on the one hand, to give to as large a portion of the people, as possible, on equal

terms, an opportunity of witnessing and trying the experiment, and at the same time not to fritter away the fund, by too minute a distribution.

Should one school only be founded, in whatever part of the Commonwealth it were placed, it would be difficult of access to the major part of those of both sexes, who would be desirous of enjoying its advantages. The class of young men and women who devote themselves, generally for the early part of life to the business of instruction, and who would be likely to seek the advantages of a Normal school, would be somewhat deterred by the expense of a journey to a remote part of the State, and the inconvenience of a residence at a great distance from home. The effect of this would be unfavorable to the main design of the experiment, which is to bring home to the majority of the citizens of Massachusetts the usefulness of institutions for the education of teachers, and to place it in such a light before the people, that they will eventually be disposed to make provision in every county of the Commonwealth, for the means of qualifying all the teachers required for their common schools.

In addition to the objections to a single institution already alluded to, and to the local jealousy, of which it might possibly be the object, in those parts of the State distant from the place of its establishment, the Board felt unwilling to stake the entire success of the experiment on the result of one trial. In an institution of a novel character,—(and of course not capable of being carried on by the momentum which exists in a system of long established and familiar institutions, and enables them to survive the effects of temporary and local mismanagement,)—the consequences of error at the outset would be fatal. Permanent injury would be done to the

cause of education in this community, should the entire fund provided for this interesting purpose be exhausted upon one establishment, and should that fail from any mismanagement, to win the public confidence.

In avoiding these risks of a single establishment, it was deemed an object by the Board to secure the other manifest advantages of a plurality. Besides those already alluded to, the establishment of three, and if found practicable, of four schools, would effect another object of considerable importance. The Board soon ascertained that in some parts of the community, and by some of the friends of education, it was deemed advisable to make the commencement with a school for the instruction of female teachers. It was doubtful, however, whether the public at large would have been satisfied with the establishment of a single school exclusively for their qualification. A school exclusively for males would have been open to still more forcible objections of the same character ;—and no experiment would probably have been deemed complete, which was limited to an establishment for either sex exclusively. How far it may be deemed expedient to establish schools where both sexes shall be admitted, must depend on public opinion in the section of the State where the school may be placed ; and on this point the Board are unable as yet to form a definite opinion. Where no objection is made to the admission of both sexes, there will of course be a convenience in organizing the school on this principle.

As soon as it was generally understood, that a fund for the establishment of Normal schools had been placed at the disposition of the Board, considerable interest was manifested on the subject of their location ; and wishes were early indicated in behalf of different places, that they

might be selected for this purpose. The first movement of this kind was made from the county of Plymouth. A highly respectable Committee of the convention of the friends of education, in that county, appeared before the Board, at their annual meeting in May, with a view to a conference on this subject. At the same meeting, a conference on the same subject was held by the Board with the Hon. J. J. Fiske, of Wrentham, since deceased, who appeared in behalf of a portion of the citizens of that place, desirous of some arrangement, which might connect the establishment of a Normal school with the Academy at Wrentham. About the same time similar overtures were made to the Board by a Committee of the Trustees of Dummer Academy, at Byfield, in the county of Essex. At a subsequent period, more or less direct applications have been made in behalf of Barre, Southbridge, and Lancaster in Worcester county, of Topsfield in Essex county, of Concord and Lexington in Middlesex, of Worthington in Hampshire, of New Salem and Northfield in Franklin, and of Braintree in Norfolk. There was abundant reason to conclude, that, in proportion as the public attention should be called to the subject, there would be the same desire felt and expressed, for the establishment of Normal schools, in other parts of the Commonwealth.

It could not but be gratifying to the Board of Education, to receive these proofs of an extensive, and rapidly increasing interest on this subject. It imposed upon them, however, the necessity of selecting between places, which on the ground of geographical position, were equally advantageous or nearly so. In this state of things it was obviously the duty of the Board to select those places, — having regard to their proper distribution

throughout the Commonwealth,—for the establishment of the Normal schools, where the most liberal co-operation might be tendered, on the part of the citizens. They were led to think, from the opinions entertained and expressed by sanguine friends of the cause in various places, that some of the towns or counties would be disposed, so far to unite their efforts with those of the Board, as to furnish buildings, and fixtures, and a fund towards current charges, provided the expenses of instruction were defrayed out of the means at the disposal of the Board. It was obvious that such a system of co-operation, between the friends of education and the Board, would be productive of the happiest effects. It would secure to the schools to be organized the advantage of a warm and vigilant local sympathy. The public, by whose aid they had been in part established, would feel a greatly enhanced interest in their prosperity. It furnished the most unobjectionable ground of selection between different places, to which the attention of the Board was called; and what was of still greater consequence, it would enable the Board out of the means, under their control, to establish a larger number of Normal schools, than would otherwise be practicable.

These reasons led the Board to bestow the most respectful consideration on the various overtures made to them, and to allow all the time that was desired for those interested to consult their fellow-citizens and ascertain the extent to which co-operation might be expected. In one of the counties it was thought expedient by the friends of education, to take the sense of the people of the towns on the day of the general election, whether they would raise their proportion of the fund proposed. Committees of the Board have visited several towns, on

behalf of which application has been made for the purpose of examining the premises which have been offered to be placed at the disposal of the Board, for the accommodation of a Normal school. Till these preliminary steps had been taken, it was impossible to proceed to the definitive location of a school or schools.

At their last meeting on the 28th December, having received from persons interested in the cause of education, at Lexington in the county of Middlesex, the offer of a building well fitted for the purpose, and of liberal pecuniary co-operation toward the current expenses of the institution, it was determined to proceed forthwith to the establishment of a Normal school, for the education of female teachers, in that place. The situation was deemed as favorable as any one which could be selected, to accommodate the counties of Essex and Middlesex, and generally the northeastern section of the State. The village has all the advantages to be desired, of local situation. Great interest is manifested in the establishment on behalf of many citizens of the place, and the premises placed at the disposition of the Board are convenient and ample.

In the regulations adopted by the Board for the schools to be established, it is proposed that candidates for admission should have attained the age of seventeen years, if males, and sixteen if females, and be instructed, if disposed to continue in the institution so long, for a period of three years. But presuming that this is a longer time than the greater part of candidates would be able to pass at a Normal school, it is designed to arrange a course of study, to occupy a year; at the end of which time a certificate of qualifications will be given to all who have merited it. The course of studies will be designed to effect

two objects. First, the attainment of a more thorough and systematic acquaintance with the branches usually taught in common schools, and an adequate foundation in other parts of knowledge highly useful to the skillful teacher; and, secondly, the art of imparting instruction to the youthful mind, which will be taught in its principles, and illustrated by opportunity for practice, by means of a model school. The course of instruction will accordingly embrace whatever is required by the statute to be taught in the common schools of Massachusetts, (with the exception of the ancient languages,) and such subsidiary studies as are required in a Normal school, according to the foregoing view of its objects. The principles of Christian ethics and piety, common to the different sects of Christians, will be carefully inculcated; and a portion of Scripture will be daily read in all the Normal schools established by the Board.

It being made the duty of the Board, to submit to the Legislature an account of the manner, in which the moneys appropriated for qualifying teachers, have been expended, the Board would state, in conclusion of this part of this report, that no disbursements have as yet taken place for this object, nor has any thing been drawn from the treasury.

In the Report of the Secretary of the Board, bearing date January 1st, 1838, and communicated to the Legislature at the last session, the following remark is made: "Not a little inconvenience results from the fact that school committees are elected at the annual town meetings in spring, and are obliged to make their returns in October following. Their returns, therefore, cover but half the time of their continuance in office, while they cover half the time of the official existence of their pre-

decessors. It is for the Legislature to say, whether there be any good reason, why the time covered by these returns, should not be coincident with their duration in office." In conformity with these suggestions, it was provided by the fifth section of a law passed 13th April, 1838, that the form of the blanks, and the inquiries provided for by the statute of the year 1837, and the time when the same shall be returned into the office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, shall hereafter be prescribed by the Board of Education. Supposing this authority to have been given to the Board, by the Legislature, for the specific purpose of providing a remedy for the inconvenience alluded to, in the passage just cited from the Secretary's report, the Board at their annual meeting in May last adopted a resolution, that the annual returns of the School Committee should be made on the first day of May in each year. By this arrangement, the returns of each Committee will embrace the condition of the schools for the entire year, during which that Committee has been in office. The Board were, of course, aware, and they regretted, that by the change of the time in making the returns, it would be impracticable to make the annual apportionment of the income of the school fund, at the commencement of the present year. In consideration, however, of the convenience and usefulness of the change, and the greatly increased value which it will give to the returns, they venture to hope that it will be generally approved by the community. The existing provisions of law require, that the income of the school fund shall be apportioned by the secretary and treasurer, and paid over on the 15th of January in each year, to the towns which shall have made the prescribed annual returns, on or before the first day of the preceding November. The change in the

time of making the returns will require a modification of the law on this subject. It will be for the Legislature to decide, whether, in making provision for the apportionment of the income of the fund, on the basis of the returns to be made on or before the first day of May next, it will order the distribution of the additional half year's income, which will then have accrued. Should this be done, no loss will have resulted to the towns from the delay in the apportionment, except a delay of six months in the receipt of a year's dividend ; and even this will be in some measure compensated by a six month's anticipation of one half of the dividend of the following year.

+ In the former annual report of the Board, some observations were made on the subject of school libraries. As far as the information possessed by the Board extends, scarce any of the districts of the Commonwealth have as yet availed themselves of the authority granted by the act of 12th of April, 1837, to expend for this object, thirty dollars for the first year, and ten for each succeeding year. A confident hope, however, is entertained, that, in proportion as the attention of the districts is called to the subject, and as convenient editions of books well calculated for the purpose, are published, school libraries will begin to be objects of interest throughout the Commonwealth and ultimately be found in all the districts. The opinion was expressed last year, that the preparation of such collections, must be left to the enterprise of intelligent publishers, who, at the present reduced cost of printing, have it in their power, by the circulation of good books, at reasonable prices, to render an inestimable service to the public.

The Board have regarded the law of the 12th of April, 1837, as the necessary result of the school system of

Massachusetts, as it has existed from time immemorial. The previous want of a regular provision for school libraries, must be considered a serious defect in that system. To what avail are our youth taught to read, if no facilities exist for obtaining books? The keys of knowledge are useless to him who has no access to the volumes to be unlocked. Although it is certainly true, that no part of our State is wholly deficient in valuable works of science and literature, yet it must be freely confessed, they do not exist in such plenty as could be desired. In a portion of the towns, there are social libraries. These, it is believed, generally depend on the precarious support of annual subscriptions, and are, too many of them, in a neglected and declining state. They can, of necessity, be conveniently accessible only to that portion of the population, who live near the place where they are deposited. Where they are kept up and supplied with a selection of the valuable works daily issuing from the press, they are universally admitted to be blessings to the community.

By the act of 12th of April, 1837, the Legislature has put it in the power of every district in the Commonwealth to possess itself of this blessing; and the Board regard it as a very interesting part of their duty,—to do whatever may be in their power to facilitate the execution of this law. Among the causes, it is supposed, which have hitherto prevented the districts from availing themselves of the authority to commence the formation of these libraries, is the difficulty of making the selection:—a difficulty of considerable magnitude, when but a small sum is to be expended, and it is necessary to send to some distant place for a supply of books. To remove this obstacle in some degree, the Board of Education determined, at an early period of the present year, to recommend to some

respectable publishing house to issue from the press a collection of works as a common school library, to consist of two series ; the one adapted for the use of children, the other for a maturer class of readers. The proposal has been acceded to by Messrs. Marsh, Capen, & Lyon, of Boston. The enterprise is to be entirely at the expense and risk of the publishers, who agree to execute the works in a style, and to furnish them to those who may choose to become purchasers, at a rate, to be approved by the Board, and which was ascertained to be the lowest, at which an arrangement could be made for its satisfactory execution. Each book in the series is to be submitted to the inspection of every member of the Board, and no work to be recommended, but on their unanimous approval. Such a recommendation, it was believed, would furnish a sufficient assurance to the public, that a sacred adherence would be had to the principle, which is embodied in the Legislation of the Commonwealth, on the subject of school books, and which provides that "school committees shall never direct to be purchased, or used in any of the town schools, any books, which are calculated to favor the tenets of any particular sect of Christians."

It will remain entirely optional, with the school districts, in availing themselves of the authority conferred by the Act of 12th of April, 1837, whether they will purchase the books recommended by the Board. It is by the law left with the discretion of the districts, what rules and regulations may be adopted for establishing and maintaining the libraries authorised to be formed ; and the Board have as little inclination as right to encroach on the exercise of this discretion. It is their purpose only to assist and encourage the publishers in the selection and publication of a series of volumes, well adapted

for the use proposed, to consist of a portion of the most approved works in science and literature, with which our language is enriched, executed in a style, and afforded at a price, which will put them generally within the reach of the school districts of the Commonwealth. The Board have great satisfaction in stating, that, in the preparation of a portion of the books to be published as a common school library, the publishers have been led to expect the assistance of many of the most distinguished writers of our own country.

In submitting their present report, the Board cannot but express their grateful sense of the attention, which was paid by the Legislature of the Commonwealth of the last year, to the various suggestions made in their former report. At no former session of the General Court has a greater interest been manifested in our schools, and the Board are persuaded that the enactments of the last year, will result in their permanent improvement. The school system of the Commonwealth is good, because it is simple. The State provides that the people shall maintain schools, and it organizes a certain machinery for their establishment and supervision. Much of this machinery is in the hands of the school committees. On their fidelity, intelligence, and zeal, it mainly depends whether the schools prosper. In those towns and districts where the committees are composed of intelligent, active, and patriotic citizens, teachers are found to be competent, school-houses are kept in repair, and the rising generation grows up under all the advantages of education, which an anxious parent can desire for a hopeful child. Where the reverse is the case, the whole system falls into disorder and decay. The powers vested in the Board of Education were wisely of a re-

commendatory character. Among the objects which first engaged their attention, were the organization and duties of school Committees. The Act of 13th April, 1838, remedies the greatest of the formerly existing evils,—provides that the official year of the Committee shall coincide with that of their returns,—requires that they shall make an annual report in open town-meeting,—shall keep a record of their proceedings to be transmitted to their successors,—and authorizes a moderate compensation for their labors. With these wise provisions of law, every thing else must be left to the public spirit and Christian zeal of the citizens who assume this important trust.

In conclusion, the Board would express their strong reliance on the wisdom of the Legislature and the intelligence of the people, to continue that favorable regard of the cause of education, which has in all former times been the glory and strength of the Commonwealth. Situated at one extremity of the Union, and occupying but an inconsiderable spot on its surface, what is it that has given to Massachusetts a name and a praise in the land? The Board know of nothing, under Providence, but the principles and institutions of our fathers ;—and among them, as far as mere human influences are concerned, pre-eminently our common schools. With the lapse of time and the progress of events, our importance in all physical relations,—such as territory, material resources, and numbers, is daily growing proportionably less. Of the new States in the West, among whose first settlers within the memory of man were some of our own adventurous citizens, one already greatly outnumbers in population our ancient and venerable Commonwealth. It is doubly incumbent upon us to look well to the sources

of intellectual and moral well-being, and see to it that whatever be the relative rank of the Commonwealth in numbers and wealth, she is determined not to sink to a secondary and degraded place in the scale of mental improvement.

EDWARD EVERETT,
GEORGE HULL,
EMERSON DAVIS,
EDMUND DWIGHT,
GEORGE PUTNAM,
ROBERT RANTOUL, Jr.
THOMAS ROBBINS,
JARED SPARKS,
CHARLES HUDSON.

BOSTON, 28th December, 1838.

NOTE. At the meeting of the Board of Education, at which the foregoing report was adopted, it was decided, if possible, to make immediate arrangements for the location of another Normal School, in the central portion of the State. Proposals had already been received from those interested in the subject in several towns, and a Committee of the Board had visited them, with a view to further inquiry on the spot. The town of Barre was recommended by various considerations of locality and ease of access. Premises sufficient for the accommodation of the school, were, by a vote of the town, placed at the disposal of the Board, and pecuniary aid toward current expenses, guaranteed on the part of individuals.

The Board, however, having considered that some further provisions for the accommodation of the school would be required, did not feel themselves warranted at their last meeting, in a final decision. The subject was referred to a Committee of the Board, authorized to confer with the Committee of the citizens of Barre, with the understanding, that if the conditions deemed requisite by the Board were complied with, a Normal School should be established in that place. The conditions have been promptly acceded to; and immediate arrangements will be made for the organization of the school.

The Board have understood, that in the section of the State which would furnish the pupils of this institution, no objection would be made to the admission of both sexes. Should this opinion prove to be correct, the school will probably be organized on this principle.

SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE

SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION.

GENTLEMEN :—

I hereby respectfully submit some account of my proceedings during the last year, in discharging the duties of the office you have confided to me. I should deem it an encroachment upon the province of the Board to advert to such topics in the administration of the school law, as are equally as well known to the Board as to myself ;—such, for instance, as the measures they have taken for establishing Normal Schools, for causing school libraries to be prepared, and the designation of the form and time for making the School Returns. I shall, therefore, confine myself to such facts as have come more immediately within my own knowledge, and to the considerations suggested by them.

During the past season, after having given seasonable notice by sending circulars to the school committee of each town in the Commonwealth, I visited the fourteen counties in the State, and, at convenient and central places, have met such of the friends of Education as chose to attend. At a majority of these meetings I have been aided by the presence and cooperation of one or more of the members of the Board. Other distinguished citizens, who, for many years, have received the fullest testimonials of the people's confidence, have been present, and have taken an active and most useful part in the proceedings. Except in the three counties of Hampden, Berkshire and Essex, the conventions have been well attended by school committees, teachers and other friends of Education. The time of the meetings has been occupied by statements, respecting the condition of the public schools, by discussions in regard to the processes of teaching, and by the delivery of one or more addresses.

It appeared from facts ascertained during the last part of the year 1837, and communicated by me to the Board in the report of Jan. 1, 1838, that the Common School system of Massachusetts had fal-

len into a state of general unsoundness and debility ; that a great majority of the schoolhouses were not only ill-adapted to encourage mental effort, but, in many cases, were absolutely perilous to the health and symmetrical growth of the children ; that the schools were under a sleepy supervision ; that many of the most intelligent and wealthy of our citizens had become estranged from their welfare, and that the teachers of the schools, although, with very few exceptions, persons of estimable character and of great private worth, yet in the absence of all opportunities to qualify themselves for the performance of the most difficult and delicate task, which, in the arrangements of Providence, is committed to human hands, were, necessarily, and therefore without fault of their own, deeply and widely deficient in the two indispensable prerequisites for their office, viz., a knowledge of the human mind, as the subject of improvement ; and a knowledge of the means best adapted wisely to unfold and direct its growing faculties. To expect, that a system, animated only by a feeble principle of life and that life in irregular action, could be restored at once to health and vigor, would be a sure preparation for disappointment. It is now twenty years, since the absolute government of Prussia, under the impulse of self-preservation, entered upon the work of entirely remodelling their Common Schools, so as to give them a comprehensiveness and an efficacy, which would embrace and educate every child in the kingdom. In this undertaking, high intelligence has been aided, at every step, by unlimited power ; and yet the work is but just completed ;—in some places and in some circumstances of detail, I believe, not yet completed. Their engine of reform is the command of the sovereign, enforced by penalties ; ours, is the intelligence of the people, stimulated by duty. Their plan has the advantage of efficiency and despatch, but it has this disadvantage, that what the ruler may decree to-day, his successor may revoke tomorrow ; ours has the disadvantage of slowness in execution, but the compensatory advantage of permanency, when accomplished. Besides, if our schools are voluntarily advanced, through the intelligence of the people, the agents themselves will be benefited, almost as much as the objects. These considerations ought to satisfy those persons, who seem impatient of delay and who think that any Board of Education could reanimate our system in one, or even in a few years.

Considering then, the description of the means to be employed for raising our schools to a reasonable and practicable point of usefulness ; it may be confidently stated, that the efforts, which have been made, in different places, have accomplished something already, and have given sure auguries of a speedier progression hereafter.

In my circuit this year, Nantucket was the first place visited. The town contains almost 10,000 inhabitants. When there, the previous season, there was but one set of public schools for all the children. To them, only children over the age of six years were admitted, and no public provision existed for the education of those below. During the last year, the town has established two primary schools for small children, and also a school (as it is denominated in the statute,) for the benefit of all the inhabitants of the town. To the last, pupils are admitted on passing an examination in the branches, required to be taught in the middle or secondary schools. The organization, therefore, is now perfect. The small children are provided for, by themselves. This is an advantage, which can hardly be overestimated. For the purpose of preserving order and silence in schools, composed of scholars of all ages, it becomes almost necessary to practise a rigor of restraint and a severity of discipline upon the small children, which is always injurious and often cruel. The youngest scholars are, constitutionally, most active. Their proportion of brain and nervous system, compared with the whole body, is much the greatest. Their restlessness does not proceed from volition, but from the involuntary impulses of nature. They vibrate at the slightest touch ; and they can no more help a responsive impulse at every sight and sound, than they can help seeing and hearing with open eyes and ears. What aggravates the difficulty is, that they have nothing to do. At a time, when nature designs they shall be more active, than at any other period of life, a stagnation of all the powers of mind and body is enforced. But while the heart beats and the blood flows, the signs of life cannot be wholly suppressed ; and therefore, the steady working of nature's laws is sure to furnish the teacher with occasions for discipline. If it would be intolerably irksome for any of the large scholars to sit still for half a day, in a constrained posture, with hands unoccupied, and eyes looking straight into vacancy, how much more intolerable is

it for the small ones? Hence the importance of having such a gradation of schools, in every place, where it is practicable, as has been lately established in Nantucket. Another invaluable advantage of having three grades of schools is, that while it diminishes, at least one-half, the number of classes in each school, it increases the number in each class, and thus allows the teacher to devote more time to the recitations and to the oral instruction of his enlarged classes. Another point, of great importance to the schools, was well illustrated in the change at Nantucket. When I was there in 1837, a private school was in operation, kept by one of the most accomplished instructors in the State, and sustained at great expense to its patrons. When the arrangement, above referred to, was made, this gentleman was employed by the town to keep the town school. The private school was, of course, given up; but he carried with him, into the town school, most of his former pupils. And he now educates many others, who could not afford the expense of the private school. Although, in such cases, the compensation of the teacher may not be quite as great, nominally, yet it will probably be worth as much; as he will receive it directly from the town, in regular instalments, and will have none of the trouble of collecting bills.

Within the last year, also, every schoolhouse in Nantucket has been provided with a good ventilator and with new and comfortable seats. This leaves little to be desired in that town, in regard to the places, where the processes of education are carried on. Competent teachers, fidelity in the committee, suitable school books, libraries and a good apparatus, and bringing *all* the children within the beneficent influences of the school, will complete the work.

For the town school, an extensive and valuable apparatus has been provided, and also some of a less costly description, for the primary schools. To accomplish these praiseworthy purposes, the town, last year, almost doubled its former appropriation.

Another highly gratifying indication of increased attention to the welfare of the schools, has been given by the city of Salem. A year ago, the schoolhouses in that city, were without ventilation, and many of them with such seats as excited vivid ideas of corporal punishment, and almost prompted one to ask the children, for what offence they had been committed. At an expense of about two

thousand dollars, the seats in all the schoolhouses, except one, have been reconstructed, and provisions for ventilation have been made. I am told, that the effect in the quiet, attention and proficiency of the pupils, was immediately manifested.

In many other places, improvements of the same kind have been made, though to a less extent and in a part only of the houses. It would be a great mistake, however, to suppose, that nothing remains to be done in this important department of the system of public instruction. The cases mentioned are the slightest exceptions, compared with the generality of the neglect. The urgent reasons for making the report on schoolhouses, the last year, still continue. In the important point of ventilation, so essential to the health, composure and mental elasticity of the pupils, most of the houses remain without change ; except indeed, that very undesirable change, which has been wrought by time and the elements ;—or such change as has been effected by stripping off the external covering of the house, on some emergency for fuel. The children must continue to breathe poisonous air, and to sit upon seats, threatening structural derangement, until parents become satisfied, that a little money may well be expended to secure to their offspring, the blessings of sound health, a good conformation, and a strong, quick-working mind.

A highly respectable physician, who, for several years, has attended to the actual results of bad internal arrangements and bad locations for schoolhouses, upon the health of the pupils, took measures, during the past summer, to ascertain with exactness, the relative amount of sickness, suffered by the children, in a given period of time, in two annual schools. The schools were selected on account of their proximity, being but a short distance from each other ; they consisted of very nearly the same number of children, belonging to families in the same condition of life, and no *general* physical causes were known to exist, which should have distinguished them from each other, in regard to the health of the pupils. But one house was dry and well ventilated ; the other damp, and so situated as to render ventilation impracticable. In the former, during a period of forty-five days, five scholars were absent, from sickness, to the amount in the whole of twenty days. In the latter, during the same period of time and for the same cause, nineteen children were absent, to an

amount in the whole of one hundred and forty-five days ;—that is almost four times the number of children, and more than seven times the amount of sickness ; and the appearances of the children not thus detained by sickness, indicated a marked difference in their condition as to health. On such a subject, where all the causes in operation may not be known, it would be unphilosophical to draw general conclusions, from a particular observation. No reason, however, can be divined, why this single result should not fairly represent the average of any given number of years. Similar results for successive years, must satisfy any one, respecting the true cause of such calamities ; if, indeed, any one can remain sceptical in regard to the connexion between good health and pure air.

The committee who take charge of the Primary Schools in the city of Boston, established, in the month of September last, a “Model School.” To this school it is intended to devote an unusual share of attention. It is under the immediate supervision of gentlemen, intelligent and highly interested in its success. Their object is to select the best books, to learn, as far as possible, the true periods of alternation between study and exercise for young children, and to improve upon existing processes for moral and intellectual training. When their plans are somewhat matured by observation and experience, it is their intention to bring the teachers of the other Primary Schools, (of which there are more than eighty in the city,) in regular succession into this school, to familiarize them with whatever, upon experiment, shall be found to succeed well. Although it cannot be doubted, that this enterprise, under the judicious management of the committee, will prove very beneficial ; yet it is hardly rational to anticipate, that it will supersede the necessity of a Normal School for the city.

I cannot doubt, that the Board will hear, with lively gratification, other evidence of an increased interest in this subject. Considering how inadequate to the wants of the whole community, a county meeting—annual only—on the subject of Education, must necessarily be, several of the county conventions appointed large and most respectable committees to prepare and deliver, or cause to be prepared and delivered, a lecture in the different towns of the respective counties ;—or, where towns were large, then, in different

places in the same town. In pursuance of this excellent plan, such lectures have already been delivered, or lecturers are now engaged in delivering them, in the counties of Nantucket, Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin, Worcester, and to some extent in Essex.

During the last summer, too, a few gentlemen in the city of Boston adopted measures to procure the delivery of a course of weekly lectures for the benefit of teachers in the city. This course commenced about the middle of October last, and still continues. Engaged, in country and city, in this voluntary and gratuitous labor, are gentlemen, who have been, or are, members of the State and National Legislatures, counsellors at law, physicians, clergymen of all denominations, experienced and long-approved teachers, and some of the most popular writers in the State. All these intelligent and forecasting men, who see, that future consequences can alone be regulated by attention to present causes, are profoundly convinced, that unless juvenile feelings, in this State and Country, are assiduously trained to an observance of law and a reverence for justice, it will be impossible to restrain adult passions from individual debasement and public commotion. The course of a stream, which a thousand men cannot obstruct, as it flows into the ocean, may be turned by a child at the fountain. Above, it will yield to the guidance of a hand ; below, its flood will sweep works and workmen away.

There are other indications, that public opinion on this subject is advancing in the right direction. More committees are inquiring into the qualifications of candidates for teaching, instead of taking such qualifications for granted. Persons, who had taught school a dozen winters have been set aside for incompetency in the elementary branches. The law, requiring committees to visit the schools, has been better observed, than ever before ; and teachers are realizing the benefit of such visitations, in the encouragement and stimulus they have supplied to the pupils. Many teachers are more justly appreciating the true elevation and responsibility of their vocation ; and are animated by those high motives, whose prerogative it is to convert toil into pleasure.

On the reverse side of this picture, however, it is my duty to present, that of the twenty-nine rich and populous towns, bound by law, to keep a school, at least ten months in each year, "for the

benefit of all the inhabitants of the town," and which were reported, last year, as violating this law, by non-compliance, only two, viz. Nantucket and Taunton, have since established the schools required. It will be recollected, that this class of towns takes precedence of almost all the others in wealth; that they expend a far less proportion of money, per scholar, for the support of public schools, than the poorer and more sparsely populated towns, while, at the same time, they expend a far greater proportion of money for private schools. At the rate of two in a year, it will take about fifteen years for all the towns in this class to comply with the law;—a length of probation, it is to be feared, which will tend to harden rather than reform the delinquents.

Sufficient time has not yet elapsed to allow the practical results of last winter's legislation to be developed. The law for the compensation of school committees was not enacted, until after the committees for the current year had been elected. The reasons, which, in former years, had deterred so many competent men from accepting that meritorious office, still existed. The ensuing annual elections will show, how far the public will consent, that any man, incompetent for, or heartless in, the performance of this responsible duty, shall be entrusted with it and receive its compensation. Nor has the time yet arrived, at which all school committees are to make to their respective towns a report, "designating particular improvements and defects in the methods or means of education, and stating such facts and suggestions in relation thereto, as in their opinion, will best promote the interests and increase the usefulness of the schools." Great good will unquestionably result from each of these provisions.

The "Register," prescribed by the law of last winter, "to be faithfully kept, in all the town and district schools in the Commonwealth," has been almost universally, (one or two places only, so far as I have learned, undertaking to absolve themselves from a compliance with the law,) introduced into the schools, with excellent effect. Skilful teachers find it a valuable auxiliary in securing greater regularity in the attendance of the scholars. By the Report of last year, it appeared, that "a portion of the children, dependent wholly upon the common schools, absented themselves from the

winter school, either permanently or occasionally, equal to a permanent absence of about one-third part of their whole number ; and a portion absented themselves from the summer schools, either permanently or occasionally, equal to a permanent absence of considerably more than two-fifths of their whole number." Thus after all the labor and expense of establishing, maintaining, and supervising the schools have been incurred ; after the schools have been brought to the very doors of the children ; the school itself is made to suffer in all its departments, by the inconstant attendance of the children, and the children suffer, in habits and character, from inconstant attendance upon the school. Whatever diminishes this evil, is cheaply bought, though at much cost. The keeping of a daily Register is also the only means, by which the committees can be enabled to make accurate, instead of conjectural, returns, for the Annual Abstracts. The "Register" and the "Annual Abstract" are so far parts of a whole, that both should be continued or both abolished. The Abstracts are prepared as statistics for legislative action and economical science. If true, they will evince philosophical principles to be the basis of wise measures. But if false, they lead to practical errors, with scientific certainty ; and they annul the chance which ignorance enjoys of being sometimes right by accident or mistake.

The Board are already aware that the "*Form*" of the Register, prepared this year, was sent out in single sheets, and for one year only, that its fitness might be tested ; and that "in order to establish a more perfect and permanent Register, all persons were invited to suggest improvements." In the circulars, sent to the school committees, this invitation was repeated. Verbally or in writing, I have received a variety of suggestions, for modifying its form. Some of these suggestions are diametrically opposite to each other, even where they come from towns lying side by side, and whose general circumstances, (except in the amount of attention, bestowed upon their schools,) are similar. The number of towns in the country, is precisely equal, which, on one side, declare it to be too complicated and particular ; and, on the other, suggest, as improvements, the addition of a number of new items. I mention these particulars, that the towns may know, how impossible is a conformity to views

so conflicting. As some teachers and school committees do not seem to be aware of the advantages of keeping so full a Register as has been proposed, perhaps it may be expedient to prepare a Form, embracing those facts only, of which a record should be kept, in every school ; and then, to leave it to those who more fully appreciate its uses, to keep such a supplementary Register as they may think best.

The report on Schoolhouses, made by me to the Board in March last, detailing, among other things, (see pp. 30, 31,) a plan for a union of school districts and a gradation of schools, in places where the compactness of the population would allow, was followed by the act of the Legislature of April 25th, authorizing a union of school districts for the important purposes specified. A few towns have already acted upon that plan, and the public mind is earnestly called to it by the friends of education in other places. Wherever it can be adopted, it will tend to diminish the evils and to increase the efficiency of our educational system.

But were all the territory of the State judiciously divided into districts ; were there a just gradation in the schools ; were every school-house good ; had every school the best teacher that could be found, and the guidance and encouragement of the most wise and assiduous school committee ;—still, all these would be only preliminary steps in the numerous and complicated processes of Education. The true medium in the government of schools, between austere demeanor and severity on the one hand, and, on the other, a facile temper, yielding to every pressure and just according to the pressure ;—the great questions of rewards and punishments, whose influence spreads out over such wide tracts of feeling and character in after-life ;—the selection of motives to enkindle the ardor of children in their studies, together with the precedence of these motives in regard to each other, that is, whether the minds of children should be forever turned outwards to the worldly advantages of wealth, office, rank, display, as incitements to duty ; or inwards, towards the perception of right and wrong in their own hearts, and to the noiseless, boundless rewards, which nature gives for conscientious conduct, in spite of the laws, or power, or hate of men ;—the one course, setting the applause of the world before rectitude, the other reversing their position :—and in regard to

processes, more intellectual in their character ;—such as the succession of studies best tending to cultivate the mental powers, in the order of their natural development ;—the question of a more or less rapid alternation from one study to another ;—the degrees in which either the instruction or government of a school should be modified so as to be adapted to peculiarities of individual character ;—all these, and many more points would remain to be settled before the outlines were filled up, of any thing worthy to be called a philosophical plan of Education. Surveying the subject, therefore, in the extent and diversity of its parts, the only practicable and useful course seemed to be, to select some particular topic, and, as far as possible, to collect facts, educe principles, and offer hints for practice. Science must grow out of observation ; art out of science.

From the earliest observations made on visiting schools, (and such as I have visited were, probably, above the average of schools in the State,) I have been impressed with the obvious want of intelligence, in the reading classes, respecting the subject-matter of the lessons. With some exceptions, I regret to say, that the eyes, features, and motions of the readers have indicated only bodily sensations, not mental activity ; while the volume of voice emitted has too closely resembled those mechanical contrivances for the transmission of fluids, which, with admirable precision, discharge equal quantities, in equal times. At the same time, I was sure, that, had the subject-matter of the reading lesson been understood, it would have opened a fountain of pleasurable emotions within, whose streams would have flowed out through every channel of expression. And on examination, I have often found, that the black and white page of the book was the outer boundary of the reader's thoughts, and a barrier to arrest their progress, instead of being a vehicle to carry them onward or upward, into whatever region the author might have expatiated. When the pupils were directed to the subject-matter of the reading lesson, to the orderly unfolding of its parts, as branches proceeding from a common trunk, I have found them committing mistakes which, though ludicrous, as facts, were most lamentable, as indications.

Deeming the mode, and the degree of success found to attend it, of teaching our children the orthography and significance of their mother tongue, to be the most important question which could be put in

regard to their intellectual culture, I determined to make those points the main objects of inquiry in my annual visit into the different counties. For distinctness' sake, I proposed, among others, the two following questions to the school committees of the several towns in the State.

1st. "*Are scholars in your schools kept in spelling classes from the time of their earliest combination of letters, up to the time of their leaving school; or what is the course ordinarily pursued, in regard to teaching orthography, and how long is it continued?*"

2nd. "*Are there defects in teaching scholars to read? This inquiry is not made in regard to the pronunciation of words and the modulation of the voice. But do the scholars fail to understand the meaning of the words they read? Do they fail to master the sense of the reading lessons? Is there a presence in the minds of the scholars, when reading, of the ideas and feelings intended to be conveyed and excited by the author?*"

In answer to another question, not here quoted, relative to the ages within which children attend our public schools, I have learnt, that *exclusive* regulations, founded on age, exist in but very few towns—probably in not more than fifteen or twenty,—in the State. And although the great majority of the children in the schools are between the ages of four and sixteen, yet in almost all the towns, they are allowed to attend both earlier and later, and they are found from three, and sometimes from two years of age, up to twenty-one years, very frequently, and sometimes to twenty-four or twenty-five. I learn, also, that, with scarcely a single exception in the whole State, the scholars are kept in spelling classes, or they spell daily from their reading lessons, from the time of their earliest combination of letters, up to the time of their leaving school; and yet, if testimony, derived from a thousand sources, and absolutely uniform, can be relied on, there is a Babel-like diversity in the spelling of our language.

It is impossible to ascertain with any considerable degree of precision the per centage of words in ordinary use, which the children are unable to spell; but it seems to be the general opinion of the most competent observers, that the schools have retrograded within the last generation or half generation, in regard to orthography. Nor is the condition of the schools better in regard to reading, as will hereafter be shown.

The evil of incorrect spelling and unintelligent reading is, by no means, wholly imputable to teachers. It springs, in part, from the use of books, ill-adapted to the different stages of growth in youthful minds. Another cause consists in a most pernicious error on the part of parents, in regard to the true objects of reading. Many teachers have assured me, that they are perfectly aware, that the time spent in reading is mainly lost ; but that the usages of the school and the demands of the district, prohibit them—perhaps under penalty of dismissal—from adopting a better mode. It is said, that the first and only inquiry, made by parents of their children is, “ how many times and how much have you read,” not “ what have you read about ? ” A question like the last, presupposes some judgment and some ability to follow it up with further inquiries ; but any body can put the first, for it is an easy problem which solves the ratio of mental progress by the number of pages mechanically gone over. The children’s minds are not looked into, to see what new operations they can accurately perform ; but the inquiry relates only to the amount of labor, done by the organs of speech ;—as though so many turns of the bodily machine would yield, perforce, a corresponding amount of mental product. It is characteristic of the learned professions, that the person employed directs the employer ; and it is earnestly to be hoped, that teachers will soon deservedly win so much of the confidence of the community, that they will no longer feel constrained to practise methods, they know to be valueless, in order to harmonize with opinions, they know to be pernicious.

It is probable, also, that this mischief may have been aggravated, in those places where there is a gradation of schools, by the conditions, prescribed in their regulations, for advancing from one school to another. One important fact, I have learned, is, that in places containing in the aggregate not less than one hundred thousand inhabitants, (about one-seventh of the population of the State,) a condition for rising from one school to another is, either in express words or in substance, that the candidate shall be able to “ read fluently.” Under such a rule, should a strong desire exist to advance children to a higher school, there is great danger that the value of *intelligent* reading will be sacrificed to the worthlessness of mere “ *fluent* ” reading.

In this State, where the schools are open to all, an inability to spell

the commonly used words in our language, justly stamps the deficient mind with the stigma of illiteracy. Notwithstanding the intrinsic difficulty of mastering our orthography, there must be some defect in the manner of teaching it ;—otherwise, this daily attention of the children to the subject, from the commencement to the end of their school-going life, would make them adepts in the mystery of spelling, except in cases of mental incapacity. Anomalous, arbitrary, contradictory, as is the formation of the words of our language from its letters, yet it is the blessing of the children, that they know not what they undertake, when they begin the labor.

But, however deeply we may be mortified at the general inability of our youth to spell well, it is the lightest of all regrets, compared with the calamity of their pretending to read, what they fail to understand. Language is not merely a necessary instrument of civilization, past or prospective, but it is an indispensable condition of our existence as rational beings. We are accustomed to speak with admiration of those assemblages of things, we call the necessities, the comforts, the blessings of life, without thinking that language is a pre-necessary to them all. It requires a union of two things, entirely distinct in themselves, to confer the highest attribute of human greatness ;—in the first place, a creative mind, revolving, searching, reforming, perfecting, within its own silent recesses ; and then such power over the energy and copiousness of language, as can bring into light whatever was prepared in darkness and can transfer it to the present or the absent, to contemporaries or posterity. Thucydides makes Pericles say, that, “one who forms a judgment upon any point, but cannot explain himself clearly to the people, might as well have never thought at all on the subject.” The highest strength of understanding and justness of feeling, without fitting language to make themselves manifest, are but as the miser’s hoard ; without even the reversion of benefit, we may ultimately expect from the latter. And for all social purposes, thought and expression are dependent, each upon the other. Ideas without words are valueless to the public ; and words without ideas have this mischievous attribute, that they inflict the severest pains and penalties on those who are most innocent of thus abusing them.

This is not a place to speak of the nature and utility of language,

any further than is rigidly necessary to an exposition of the best mode of acquiring and the true object in using it. Within this limit, it may be observed, that we arrive at knowledge in two ways ; first, by our own observation of phenomena without, and our own consciousness of what passes within us ; and we seek words aptly to designate whatever has been observed, whether material or mental. In this case the objects and events are known to us, before the names, or phrases, which describe them ; or, secondly, we see or hear words, and through a knowledge of their diversified applications, we become acquainted with objects and phenomena, of which we should otherwise have remained forever ignorant. In this case, the words precede a knowledge of the things they designate. In one case we are introduced to words through things ; in the other, to things, through words ; but when once both have been strongly associated together, the presence of either will suggest its correlative. The limited fund of knowledge laid open to us by the former mode bears no assignable proportion to the immense resources proffered us by the latter. Without language, we should know something of the more obtrusive phenomena, within reach of the senses, but an impenetrable wall of darkness would lie beyond their narrow horizon. With language, that horizon recedes until the expanse of the globe, with its continents, its air, its oceans, and all that are therein, lies under our eye, like an adjacent landscape. Without language, our own memory dates the beginning of time, and the record of our own momentary existence contains all that we can know of universal history. But with language, antiquity re-lives ; we are spectators at the world's creation ; we are present with our first progenitors, when the glory of a new life beamed from their inanimate frames ; the long train of historic events passes in review before us ; we behold the multiplication and expansion of our race, from individuals to nations, from patriarchs to dynasties ; we see their temporal vicissitudes and moral transformations ; the billowy rise and fall of empires ; the subsidence of races, whose power and numbers once overshadowed the earth ; the emergence of feeble and despised tribes into wide extended dominion ; we see the dealings of God with men, and of men with each other ;—all, in fine, which has been done and suffered by our kindred nature, in arms, arts, science, phi-

losophy, judicature, government ; and we see them, not by their own light only, but by the clearer light reflected upon them from subsequent times. What contrast could be more striking, than that between an unlettered savage and a philosopher,—the one imprisoned, the other privileged,—in the halls of the same library ;—the one compelled by fear to gaze upon the pages of a book, the other impatient for the pleasure of doing it ! As the former works his reluctant eye downwards over successive lines, he sees nothing but ink and paper. Beyond, it is vacancy. But to the eye of the philosopher, the sombre pages are magically illuminated. By their light he sees other lands and times. All that filled his senses before he opened the revealing page is only an atom of the world, in which he now expatiates. He is made free of the universe. A sentiment, uttered thousands of years ago, if touched by the spirit of humanity, falls freshly upon his responsive bosom. The fathers of the world come out of the past and stand around him and hold converse with him, as it were, face to face. Old eloquence and poetry are again heard and sung. Sages imbue him with their wisdom ; martyrs inspire him by their example ; and the authors of discoveries, each one of whom won immortality by the boon he conferred upon the race, become his teachers. Truths, which it took ages to perfect and establish ; sciences elaborated by the world's intellect, are passed over to him, finished and whole. This presents but the faintest contrast, between the savage and the philosopher, looking at the same books, and, to a superficial observer, occupied alike.

To prepare children for resembling the philosopher, rather than the savage, it is well to begin early, but it is far more important to begin right ; and the school is the place for children to form an invincible habit of never using the organs of speech, by themselves, and as an apparatus, detached from, and independent of, the mind. The school is the place to form a habit of observing distinctions between words and phrases, and of adjusting the language used to various extents of meaning. It is the place, where they are to commence the great art of adapting words to ideas and feelings, just as we apply a measuring instrument to objects to be measured. Then, in after life, they will never venture upon the use of words which they do not understand ; and they will be enabled to use lan-

guage, co-extensive with their thoughts and feelings,—language which shall mark off so much of any subject as they wish to exhibit, as plainly as though they could have walked round it and set up landmarks.

There is time enough devoted to exercises on language in our schools, to have enabled every one of that numerous class of citizens, whose attainments and good sense entitle them to be elected to municipal offices or to some station in the government, to prepare written documents, to draft petitions, reports and so forth, upon all ordinary subjects, not professional or technical. Yet how many men of excellent judgment find themselves unable to express their thoughts clearly and forcibly, in speech or writing, because they have never been accustomed to apply language to mental operations. Every man, conversant with the profession of the law, knows, that no inconsiderable portion of those litigated cases, which burden courts and embroil neighborhoods, arises from some misapprehension of the meaning of the language, used by the parties, in oral or written contracts. The time, spent by the scholars in reading, from the age of eight or ten to sixteen years, is amply sufficient to enrich their minds with a great amount of various and useful knowledge, without encroaching one hour upon other accustomed studies.

There is another fact, most pertinent to this part of the subject. It is well known that science itself, among scientific men, can never advance far beyond a scientific language in which to record its laws and principles. An unscientific language, like the Chinese, will keep a people unscientific forever. So the knowledge of a people on any subject, cannot far exceed the compass of the language, which they fully comprehend. If what are called the exact sciences do not depend upon the exactness of the language they use, all exactness in other sciences does. Nor is it a fact of less importance, that language reacts upon the mind that uses it. It is like the garments, in which some nations clothe themselves, which shape the very limbs, that draw them on. Men are generally very willing to modify or change their opinions and views, while they exist in thought merely, but when once formally expressed, the language chosen often becomes the mould of the opinion. The opinion fills the mould but cannot break it and assume a new form. Thus errors of thought and of life, originate in impotence of language.

The English language has been estimated to contain seventy or eighty thousand words in reputable use. A knowledge of so many of these words as are in common use, with a power of summoning them, like trained bands, to come at the bidding of thought, arises from the smallest beginnings. The distance is so immense, between the first, rude articulation of an infant, and the splendid and law-giving utterance of an eloquent man, that we could hardly believe, beforehand, that the two extremes had reference to the same individual. To gain time, by shortening the distance between these extremes, or by removing obstacles and thus accelerating progress from the former to the latter, is one of the most appropriate labors of education. The hints which follow are offered with diffidence ;—in the hope, however, that they may prove useful themselves, or be suggestive to other minds of that which is better.

The process of learning to spell our language is so imperceptibly lost in that of learning to read it, that the two can best be considered together.

One preliminary truth is to be kept steadily in view in all the processes of teaching, and in the preparation of all its instruments ; viz. that, though much may be done by others to aid, yet the effective labor must be performed by the learner himself. Knowledge cannot be poured into a child's mind, like fluid from one vessel into another. The pupil may do something by intuition, but generally there must be a conscious effort on his part. He is not a passive recipient, but an active, voluntary agent. He must do more than admit or welcome ; he must reach out, and grasp, and bring home. It is the duty of the teacher to bring knowledge within arm's length of the learner ; and he must break down its masses into portions so minute, that they can be taken up and appropriated, one by one ; but the final appropriating act must be the learner's. Knowledge is not annexed to the mind like a foreign substance, but the mind assimilates it by its own vital powers. It is far less true, that each one must earn his own bread by the sweat of his own brow, than it is that each one must earn his own knowledge by the labor of his own brain ; for, strictly speaking, nature recognises no title to it by inheritance, gift or finding. Development of mind is by growth and organization, not by external accretion. Hence all effective teaching must have reference

to this indispensable, consummating act and effort of the learner. The feelings may undoubtedly be modified by external impressions, and, therefore, the mind is sometimes spoken of as passive, recipient, adoptive ; and the objects around us have a fitness and adaptation to awaken mental activity ; but the acquisition of positive knowledge is not effected by a process of involuntary absorption. Such a notion belongs to the philosophy by which, a few years ago, a grammatical chart was published and pretty extensively sold in some of the States, whose peculiar virtue it was, that, if hung up somewhere in a house, the whole family would shortly become good grammarians, by mysteriously imbibing, as it were, certain grammatical effluvia. The distinction should become broader and broader, between the theory of education which deals with mind as living spirit, and that which deals with it as a lifeless substance. Every scholar, in a school, must think with his own mind, as every singer, in a choir, must sing with his own voice.

If then, in learning, all wills and desires, all costs, labors, efforts, of others, are dependant, at last, upon the will of the learner, the first requisite is the existence in his mind of a desire to learn. Children, who spend six months in learning the alphabet, will, on the playground, in a single half day or moonlight evening, learn the intricacies of a game or sport,—where to stand, when to run, what to say, how to count, and what are the laws and the ethics of the game ;—the whole requiring more intellectual effort than would suffice to learn half a dozen alphabets. So of the recitation of verses, mingled with action, and of juvenile games, played in the chimney corner. And the reason is, that for the one, there is desire ; while against the other, there is repugnance. The teacher, in one case, is rolling a weight up hill, in the other, down ; for gravitation is not more to the motions of a heavy body, than desire is to the efficiency of the intellect. Until a desire to learn exists within the child, some foreign force must constantly be supplied to keep him agoing ; but from the moment that a desire is excited, he is self-motive, and goes alone.

Perhaps the best way of inspiring a young child with a desire of learning to read is, to read to him, with proper intervals, some interesting story, perfectly intelligible, yet as full of suggestion as of communication ; for the pleasure of discovering is always greater than

that of perceiving. Care should be taken, however, to leave off, before the ardor of curiosity cools. He should go away longing, not loathing. After the appetite has become keen,—and nature supplies the zest,—the child can be made to understand how he can procure this enjoyment for himself. The motive of affection also may properly be appealed to, that is, a request to learn in order to please the teacher ; but this should never be pressed so far as to jeopard its existence, for it is a feeling more precious than all knowledge. The process of learning words and letters is toilsome, and progress will be slow, unless a motive is inspired before instruction is attempted ; and if three months are allowed to teach a child his letters, there is greater probability, that the work will be done at the end of the time, even though ten weeks of it should be spent in gaining his voluntary co-operation, during the residue of the time. A desire of learning is better than all external opportunities, because it will find or make opportunities, and then improve them.

Such are the difficulties in acquiring the orthography of our language, that it is said we have but two or three classes of uniformly correct spellers. Almost all, except publishers or printers and proof-readers, are more or less deficient in this acquisition. While some other languages, as the Italian, French and German, assign to individual letters a power, which is scarcely varied whenever they recur ; the power given to the letters, in the English alphabet, bears little resemblance to their power, when combined in words. In a vast number of words, there is a uniformity of pronunciation with diversity in spelling, or a diversity in pronunciation with similar spelling. The same letter has many different sounds, while different letters have the same sound, so that the learner, after learning the sound of a letter in one place, has no assurance of being right in giving it the same sound in another. The letters seem to change work with each other. Added to this, many words have silent letters, and in words, otherwise of a formation exactly similar, some have silent letters, others none. Were it not for our familiarity with it, no fact would be more striking, than that which always presents itself to the eye, upon opening an English dictionary ; viz. the double column of words for the same language,—one for a guide in spelling, the other, in pronunciation. But it is no part of this report to analyse our lan-

guage and expose its unscientific structure and anomalous composition. It is either very much too late or too early to reform its arbitrary constitution. To adapt the pronunciation to the orthography would be to make a new spoken language ;—to adapt its orthography to its pronunciation would be to make a new written one.

When a motive to learn exists, the first practical question respects the order in which letters and words are to be taught ; i. e. whether letters, taken separately, as in the alphabet, shall be taught before words, or whether monosyllabic and familiar words shall be taught before letters. In those who learnt, and have since taught, in the former mode, and have never heard of any other, this suggestion may excite surprise. The mode of teaching words first, however, is not mere theory ; nor is it new. It has now been practised for some time in the primary schools of the city of Boston,—in which there are four or five thousand children,—and it is found to succeed better than the old mode. In other places in this country, and in some parts of Europe, where education is successfully conducted, the practice of teaching words first, and letters subsequently, is now established. Having no personal experience, I shall venture no affirmation upon this point ; but will only submit a few remarks for the consideration of those, who wish, before countenancing the plan, to examine the reasons on which it is founded.

During the first year of a child's life, he perceives, thinks, and acquires something of a store of ideas, without any reference to words or letters. After this, the wonderful faculty of language begins to develop itself. Children then utter words,—the names of objects around them,—as whole sounds, and without any conception of the letters of which those words are composed. In speaking the word "apple," for instance, young children think no more of the Roman letters, which spell it, than, in eating the fruit, they think of the chemical ingredients,—the oxygen, hydrogen, and carbon,—which compose it. Hence, presenting them with the alphabet, is giving them what they never saw, heard, or thought of before. It is as new as algebra, and to the eye, not very unlike it. But printed names of known things are the signs of sounds which their ears have been accustomed to hear, and their organs of speech to utter, and which may excite agreeable feelings and associations, by reminding them of the objects named. When put

to learning the letters of the alphabet first, the child has no acquaintance with them, either by the eye, the ear, the tongue, or the mind ; but if put to learning familiar words first, he already knows them by the ear, the tongue, and the mind, while his eye only is unacquainted with them. He is thus introduced to a stranger, through the medium of old acquaintances. It can hardly be doubted, therefore, that a child would learn to name any twenty-six familiar words, much sooner than the twenty-six unknown, unheard and unthought of letters of the alphabet.

For another reason, the rapidity of acquisition will be greater, if words are taught before letters. To learn the words signifying objects, qualities, actions, with which the child is familiar, turns his attention to those objects, if present, or revives the idea of them, if absent, and thus they may be made the source of great interest and pleasure. We all know, that the ease with which any thing is learned and the length of time it is remembered, are in the direct ratio of the vividness of the pleasurable emotions, which enliven the acquisition.

But there is another consideration far more forcible than the preceding. The general practice is founded upon the notion that the learning of letters facilitates the correct combination of them into words. Hence children are drilled on the alphabet, until they pronounce the name of each letter at sight. And yet, when we combine letters into words, we forthwith discard the sounds, which belonged to them as letters. The child is taught to sound the letter *a*, until he becomes so familiar with it, that the sound is uttered as soon as the character is seen. But the first time, this letter is found, even in the most familiar words,—as in *father, papa, mama, apple, peach, walnut, hat, cap, bat, rat, slap, pan, &c. &c.*—it no longer has the sound he was before taught to give it, but one entirely different. And so of the other vowels. In words, they all seem in masquerade. Where is the alphabetic sound of *o* in the words, *word, dove, plough, enough, other*, and in innumerable others. Any person may verify this by taking any succession of words, at random, in any English book. The consequence is, that whenever the child meets his old friends in new company, like rogues, they have all changed their names. Thus the knowledge of the sounds of letters

in the alphabet becomes an obstacle, to the right pronunciation of words ; and the more perfect the knowledge, the greater the obstacle. The reward of the child, for having thoroughly mastered his letters, is to have his knowledge of them cut up in detail, by a regular series of contradictions, just as fast as he brings it forward. How different, for instance, is the sound of the word *is*, from the two alphabetic sounds, *i* and *s* ;—of the word *we*, from the two sounds, *w* and *e* ;—of the word, *two*, from the three sounds, *t*, *w*, and *o*. We teach an honest child to sound the letters, *e*, *y*, *e*, singly, until he utters them at sight, and then, with a grave face, we ask him what *e*, *y*, *e*, spells ; and if he does not give the long sound of *i*, he is lucky, if he escapes a rebuke or a frown. Nothing can more clearly prove the delightful confidence and trustfulness of a child's nature, than his not boldly charging us, under such circumstances, with imposition and fraud.

There is a fact, however, which may, perhaps, in part, cancel the differences, here pointed out. The alphabet must be learned, at some time, because there are various occasions, besides those of consulting dictionaries or cyclopædias, where the regular sequence of the letters must be known ; and possibly it may be thought, that it will be as difficult to learn the letters, after learning the words, as before. But the fact, which deprives this consideration of some part at least of its validity, is, that it always greatly facilitates an acquisition of the names of objects, or persons, to have been conversant with their forms and appearances beforehand. The learning of words is an introduction to an acquaintance with the letters, composing them.

To obviate the inconsistency of teaching children the names of letters, which are to be untaught as soon as they are combined into words, some persons instruct them in the vocal elements of the letters only ;—that is, to utter, for each letter, that part of the sound of a whole word, which belongs to the letters, respectively,—as to give a single breathing for the letter *h*, instead of the sound of *aytch*. This practice is very limited.

The next step in the acquisition of our language is the spelling of its words. The arbitrary and capricious formation of words from letters, is, undoubtedly, one great cause, that with all our attention to the subject, we have so few good spellers.

One fact has been often remarked, that if children do not learn to spell pretty correctly, before the age of ten or twelve years, they rarely become good spellers afterwards. This fact supplies us with a useful hint, in regard to making other studies give place, a little, to this, before the favorable season is passed. Another consideration, derived from the order in which the intellectual powers are developed, strongly corroborates the same position. Language is an early developed intellectual power ;—reason is one of the latest. The spelling of a tongue, so anomalous as ours, depends upon a verbal memory. It is not a subject to be reasoned about. The more one relies upon his reason to determine the true spelling of English words, the oftener he will mistake. The discovery and correct application of principles and analogies would generally exclude correctness. I presume it has happened to many persons, when writing, that if they could write one of the less common words, without thinking how it should be spelt, they would write it correctly ; but if, by any chance, the inquiry how it should be spelt, arose in their minds, they would immediately be involved in doubts, which no reasoning could solve, and be obliged to turn to a dictionary. These facts indicate also, that spelling should be pursued at an age, when more is learned by perception and imitation, than by reflection.

But one thing should be insisted upon, *from* the beginning, and especially *at* the beginning. No word should be taught, whose meaning is not understood. The teacher should not count out words, faster than ideas. The foundation of the habit should be laid, in the reading of the very first lesson, of regarding words as the names of things ; as belonging to something else, and as nothing by themselves. They should be looked at, as a medium, and not as an end. It is as senseless for a child to stop at the sign of the printed word, in reading, as it would be to stop at the sound of the spoken word, in conversation. What child would not repel the intercourse of a person, who spoke to him only words, of which he knew nothing ? No personal charms would be long sufficient to compensate for speaking to a child, in an unknown tongue. How is it possible then, that an active-minded child should not disdain the dreary pages of a book, which awaken no thought or emotion within him ;—which are neither beauty to the eye, nor music to the ear,

nor sense to the understanding ? As reading is usually taught, the child does not come into communication with his lesson, by any one of all his faculties. When a child looks into a mirror, or at a picture where the perspective is strikingly marked, he will reach around to look behind the mirror, or behind the picture, in hope of finding the objects in the place where they appear to be. He cares nothing for the mirror, nor for the canvass ;—his mind is with the things presented to his senses. In reading, the page should be only as the mirror or picture, through which objects are beheld. Thus there would be far more delight in looking at the former, than at the latter ; because words can present more circumstances of variety, beauty, life, amplitude, than any reflecting surface or dead picture. Should we not revolt at the tyranny of being obliged to pore, day after day, upon the outer darkness of a Chinese manuscript ? But if the words are not understood, the more regular formation of the Chinese characters gives them a decided advantage over our own letters. Give a child two glasses, precisely similar in every respect, except that one shall be opaque, the other a magnifier. Through the former nothing can be seen, and it therefore degenerates into a bauble ; but the latter seems to create a thousand new and brilliant objects, and hence he is enamored of its quality. There is precisely the same difference in the presentation of words. Yet we punish children, because they do not master words, without any regard to their being understood.

But how can this plan be executed ? In this way. During the first year of a child's life, before the faculty of speech is developed,—before he has ever uttered a word,—he has obtained a considerable stock of ideas, respecting objects, qualities and motions. During the next year or two and before it is usual to teach letters, he is employed through every waking hour, both in learning the words, expressive of known phenomena and also in acquiring a knowledge of new things and events ; so that before the age of four or even three years, the items of his inventory of elementary knowledge swell to thousands. In his memory, are not merely playthings, but catalogues of furniture, food, dress, insects, animals, vehicles, objects in natural scenery, divisions of time, and so forth, with various motions and appearances, belonging to them all. Numbers, sounds, events, feel-

ings, also come into the list. This is a stock not readily exhausted. By first teaching the names or phrases expressive of these, the substance is always present to his mind, and the words are mere signs or incidents ; and a habit is formed of always keeping the mind, in after-life, intent upon things and their relations,—a habit of inestimable value and the only foundation of intellectual greatness.

I am not unaware of what is said by Locke, Burke and others, of our using words and phrases, without at all summoning into the mind, the particular ideas, signified. This is undoubtedly true, to some extent, but it belongs to a later period in life. It is only after having used words, times almost innumerable, with an accompanying conception of the things signified, that we, at last, transfer to the words, a general conception of what originally belonged to the ideas. If comparisons may be allowed to illustrate a point somewhat obscure, the words have been so long used as a vehicle of the things, that, at last, when we see the vehicle, we presume the contents ;—or, as in the case of those persons, who are accustomed to count large masses of specie, over and over again, in branded boxes or labelled bags ; having opened them many times and found them to contain the quantity stamped, they afterwards count by the mark. So it is with words in relation to ideas. But, if the ideas have never been compared with the words ; that is, if the specie has never been counted and compared with the stamp, then, the latter has no signification. Hence the comparisons are the very first steps in the operation, and it is only by virtue of having made them, that we can afterwards venture to facilitate the operation, by relying upon the index. And an early habit of associating every word with an idea, is rendered so much the more necessary, because words are only arbitrary and artificial signs of thoughts and feelings. Were they natural signs, then the whole stress of observation and experience through life would serve to connect and bind together, more and more closely, the signs and the things signified. There would be a perpetual and strong tendency to coalescence between them. But as the relation is wholly conventional, if the habit is not formed of uniting the sound to the sense, an opposite habit of separating them is necessarily established. For an obvious reason, therefore, a correct habit is more easily formed at the commencement than ever afterwards.

Were this process observed, it would reduce almost to nothing two classes of men amongst us ; one of whom are greatly impaired in their usefulness, because, though they think much, they can never speak ; the other absolutely noxious, because, though speaking much, they never think. The latter class, indeed, seem to be retaliating upon that early period of their life, when they thought without speaking, by speaking without thinking, during the residue.

When it is said, however, that a child should not be put to reading what he cannot understand, it is to be taken with that reasonable qualification, which springs from the nature of the case, and which every candid mind will supply. There are certain words in every-day use, of whose comprehension all finite intellect must fall almost infinitely short. Such are the words immensity, infinity, absolute perfection, and so forth. These are used, as mathematicians use algebraic signs, to express unknown quantities. There are other words also, of whose meaning, no man has any thing more than a proximate apprehension. But a child of three years may perfectly understand what is meant, if he reads the word *newspaper*, and he may know many things respecting it, such as *title*, *outside*, *inside*, *columns*, *margin*, *top*, *bottom*, *size*, *length*, *breadth &c*,—and these constitute a palpable idea of a newspaper,—without knowing, that it is a microcosm, and that, for its production, there may have been required an effort of all the human faculties, working on the three kingdoms, mineral, vegetable and animal. So a child may have a clear conception of the meaning of such words, as *home*, *parent*, *affection*, *guilt*, *conscience*, without penetrating one line's length into their unfathomable depth of meaning. What is insisted upon is, that the child should have a clear conception of what is meant, that such conception should be correct, as far as it goes, and that it should be as extensive as his ability will allow.

Were a child skilfully taught, with only a due alternation between physical and mental exercise, and with an inspection of as many of the objects of nature and art, as common opportunity would allow, it is believed, that he might acquire a knowledge of the spelling and of the *primary* meanings of substantially all the unscientific and untechnical words, in ordinary use, before passing the age, when orthography becomes more difficult of attainment. If, however, owing to

early neglect in education, or to mental inefficiency, the most favorable season for learning to spell is passing away, and it is deemed advisable to hasten this acquisition at the expense of other studies, or, (if any one so prefers,) even of the meaning of words ; then it is believed, that the words may be so classified in the spelling-book, as greatly to facilitate the labor. For this purpose, let words be arranged together, whose difficult syllables agree in formation ; as, for instance, *syllable*, *sycophant*, *sylvan*, *symbol*, *synagogue*, *syntax*, in which *y* has the sound of *i*, short ; or in words, where *ch* has the sound of *k*, as in *machination*, *chronological*, *bacchanalian* ; or in words, where *qu* has the sound of *k*, as in *mosque*, *opaque*, *liquor* ; or where *ei* has the sound of *a*, as in *eight*, *weight*, *inveigh*, &c. This list might be almost indefinitely extended ; the above are given as specimens merely. The great advantage of this system is, that when the true formation of the difficult syllable is known for one word, it is known for the whole table, and frequent repetitions of the table will fix the order of the letters in the memory, which by the law of association, will afterwards involuntarily recur, like products in the multiplication table, or successive notes in a well-learned piece of music. Habit, founded on this association, will command the successive letters in writing, as unconsciously, as it does successive steps in walking. An excellent spelling-book has lately been published in this city, in which words are arranged with reference to their intelligibleness to children ; and Webster and Fowle have made close approximation, certainly, to arrangements of words, in conformity with the law of mental association, above referred to. It is believed that a spelling-book may be prepared which shall combine the first, greatest, and most indispensable of all requisites, that of addressing the innate and universal love of learning new things,—with such a philosophical adaptation to the successive periods of mental development, as shall, as a general rule, present what is to be learned, during the epoch, in which it can be most easily, and pleasurabley acquired.

Would my limits permit, I should be glad to enter into some detail with regard to the modes, now practised in our schools, of teaching orthography. I will, however, only observe, that spelling, by writing, (when the pupil can write,) appears to have great advantages over spelling orally. In the business of life, we have no occa-

sion to spell orally, and thousands of cases have made it certain, that the same person may be a good speller with the lips, who is an indifferent one with the pen. Nor is this any more strange, than that a man should not be able to do dexterously with his left hand, what he has always been accustomed to do with his right.

It is obvious, that even in regard to orthography, the book-maker is the great auxiliary of the teacher. It is not less emphatically true of reading, that the book-maker and the teacher are performing different parts of one work. In this division of labor, the book-maker's part is first to be performed, and it is impossible for the best teacher wholly to make amends for what is untoward or preposterous on the author's part ; because clumsy and defective implements will baffle the ingenuity of the most perfect workman. While measures are in progress, therefore, to increase the competency of teachers, through the medium of Normal Schools ; the principles on which school books should be prepared, should receive careful attention, that good agents may have good instruments. I avail myself of this occasion to make a few suggestions upon the subject of reading books.

Reading is divisible into two parts. It consists of the *mechanical*, and the *mental*. The mechanical part is the utterance of the articulate sounds of a language, on inspecting its written or printed signs. It is called mechanical, because the operation closely resembles that of a machine, which may receive the best of materials and run through a thousand parcels of them every year ;—the machine itself remaining just as bare and naked at the end of the year, as it was at the beginning. On the other hand, one portion of the mental part of reading consists in a reproduction in the mind of the reader of whatever was in the mind of the author ; so that whether the author describes atoms or worlds, narrates the history of individuals or nations, kindles into sublimity, or melts in pathos,—whatever was in the author's mind starts into sudden existence in the reader's mind, as nearly as their different mental constitutions will allow. An example of the purely mechanical part is exhibited in reading a foreign language, no word of which is understood ; as in the case of Milton's daughters, who read the dead languages to their blind father ;—they, with eyes, seeing nothing but black marks upon white paper,—he, without eyes, surveying material and spiritual worlds,—at once charmed by their beauties, and instructed by their wisdom.

With the mental part, then, reading becomes the noblest instrument of wisdom ; without it, it is the most despicable part of folly and worthlessness. Beforehand, it would seem quite as incredible, that any person should compel children to go through with the barren forms of reading, without ideas ; as to make them perform all the motions of eating, without food. The body would not dwindle under the latter, more certainly, than the mind, under the former. The inevitable consequences are, that all the delight of acquisition is foregone ; the reward which nature bestows upon the activity of the faculties is forfeited,—a reward which is richer than all prizes and more efficient than all chastisement ;—and an inveterate habit is formed of dissociating thought and language. “Understandest thou what thou readest,” therefore, is a question quite as apposite when put by a teacher to a child in his horn book, as when asked by an Apostle of the ambassador of a Queen.

Entertaining views of the importance of this subject, of which the above is only the feeblest expression, I have devoted especial pains to learn, with some degree of numerical accuracy, how far the reading, in our schools, is an exercise of the mind in thinking and feeling, and how far it is a barren action of the organs of speech upon the atmosphere. My information is derived, principally, from the written statements of the school committees of the respective towns,—gentlemen, who are certainly exempt from all temptation to disparage the schools, they superintend. The result is, that more than eleven-twelfths of all the children in the reading classes, in our schools, do not understand the meaning of the words they read ; that they do not master the sense of the reading lessons, and that the ideas and feelings intended by the author to be conveyed to, and excited in, the reader’s mind, still rest in the author’s intention, never having yet reached the place of their destination. And by this, it is not meant, that the scholars do not obtain such a full comprehension of the subject of the reading lessons, in its various relations and bearings, as a scientific or erudite reader would do, but that they do not acquire a reasonable and practicable understanding of them. It would hardly seem that the combined efforts of all persons, engaged, could have accomplished more, in defeating the true objects of reading.

How the cause of this deficiency is to be apportioned among the

legal supervisors of the schools, parents, teachers or authors of school books, it is impossible to say ; but surely it is an evil, gratuitous, widely prevalent and threatening the most alarming consequences. But it is not a remediless one. There is intelligence enough, in this community, to search out the cause, and wisdom enough to find and apply a remedy.

It has been already stated, that we may acquire a knowledge of a very few things,—such as are placed within the range of our senses,—without the use of language ; but that language is the only medium, by which any thing, prior to our own memory and experience, or beyond our own vision, can be made known to us. Although, therefore, the words which our language is said to contain, seem to be many ; yet when we think of all the relations of human life,—domestic, business, and social ;—of the countless objects in the different kingdoms of nature, with their connexions and dependencies ;—of the sciences, which have been founded upon them, and of the arts, to which they have been made subservient ;—of all, in fine, external to ourselves, within the circle of time and beneath the arch of heaven ; and of our own conscious hopes, fears, desires, to which that arch is no boundary ; we shall see, at once, that the words of our language, numerous as they are, are only as one to infinity, compared with the number of the objects to which they are daily applied. And yet these words are sufficient not only to present us with an image and a record of past and present existences, but they are capable of outrunning the course of time, and describing the possibilities of the future, and of transcending the limits of reality and portraying the fancy-peopled worlds, created by the imagination. And, what is still more wonderful, is, that with the aid of these comparatively few words, we can designate and touch, as it were with the finger, any one fact or event in this universe of facts and events, or parcel out any groups of them, from tens to tens of myriads ; or we can note any period on the dial-plate of by-gone centuries, just as easily as we refer to the hours of the passing day. Now to accomplish this, it is obvious, that language must be susceptible of combinations indefinitely numerous ; that most of its single words must assume different meanings, in different collocations, and that phrases, capable of expressing any one, or any millions of these facts, vicissitudes, relations, must be absolutely

inexhaustible. Then, again, language has various, strongly marked forms, as colloquial, philosophical, poetical, devotional ; and in each of these divisions, whatever subject we wish to separate from the rest, language can carve it out and display it distinctly and by itself, for our examination. It handles the most abstruse relations and affinities, and traces the most subtle analogies to their vanishing point ; or, with equal ease, it condenses the most universal principles into brief sentences, or, if we please, into single words. Hence, in using it, to express any greater or smaller part of what is perceived by the senses, by intellect, or by genius, the two conditions are, that we must discern, mentally, what individual object or quality, or what combinations of objects and qualities, we wish to specify ; and then we must select the words and form the phrases,—or volumes, if need be,—which will depict or designate by name, the individual objects we mean, or will draw a line round the combination of objects we wish to exhibit and describe. All true use of language, therefore, necessarily involves a mental act of adjustment, measure, precision, pertinency ; otherwise it cannot fix the extent or gauge the depth of any subject. Language is to be selected and applied to the subject-matter, whether that subject-matter be business, history, art or consciousness, just as a surveyor applies his chain to the measurement of areas, or as an artist selects his colors to portray the original. But what must be the result, if the surveyor knows nothing of the length of the chain he uses, and if the artist selects his colors by chance, and knows not to what parts he applies them ?

Hence, the acquisition of language consists far less in mastering words as individuals, than it does in adjusting their applications to things, in sentences and phrases. And one great object—there are others not less important—of teaching the children in our schools to read, is, that they may there commence this habit of adjustment, of specifying and delineating with precision, whatever is within the range of their knowledge and experience. All attempts, therefore, to teach language to children, are vain, which have not this constant reference to the subject-matter, intended to be specified and described. If the thing signified is not present to the mind, it is impossible, that the language should be a measure, for, by the supposition, there is nothing to be measured. It becomes a mere hollow sound ; and with

this disadvantage, that, from the parade, which is made in administering the nothingness, the child is led to believe he has received something. The uselessness of such a process would seem to be enough, without the falsity. The fact, that many children may not be able to make great progress in this adjustment of words to things, so far from being any reply to this view of the subject, only renders it so much the more important, that what is done should be done rightly.

Notwithstanding the immense treasures of knowledge, accumulated, in the past six thousand years, and the immense difference between the learned men of our own, and of ancient times ; yet no one denies that children are now brought into the world in the same state of ignorance, as they were before the flood. When born, only a single instinct is developed,—that of appetite for food. Weeks pass, before the quickest of all the senses—the sight—takes note of any object. At about the age of a year, the faculty of language dimly appears. One after another, other powers bud forth ; but it seems to be the opinion of the best metaphysicians, that the highest faculties of the intellect—those which, in their full development and energy, make the lawgivers of the race, and the founders of moral dynasties—hardly dawn before the age of twelve or fourteen years. And yet, in many of the reading books, now in use, in the schools, the most pithy sayings of learned men ; the aphorisms in which moralists have deposited a life of observation and experience ; the maxims of philosophers, embodying the highest forms of intellectual truth, are set down as First Lessons for children ;—as though, because a child was born after Bacon and Franklin, he could understand them of course. While a child is still engrossed with visible and palpable objects, while his juvenile playthings are yet a mystery to him, he is presented with some abstraction or generalization, just discovered, after the profoundest study of men and things, by some master intellect. But it matters not to children, how much knowledge or wisdom there may be in the world, on subjects foreign to themselves, until they have acquired strength of mind sufficient to receive and appropriate them. The only interest which a child has, in the attainments of the age, in which he is born, is, that they may be kept from him, until he has been prepared to receive them. Erudite and scientific men, for their own convenience, have formed summaries, digests, abstracts, of

their knowledge, each sentence of which contains a thousand elements of truth, that had been mastered in detail ; and, on inspection of these abbreviated forms, they are reminded of, *not taught*, the individual truths they contain. Yet these are given to children, as though they would call up in their minds the same ideas, which they suggest to their authors. But while children are subjected to the law of their Creator, that of being born in ignorance, their growth is the desideratum, which Education should supply, and their intellect cannot thrive upon what it does not understand ;—nay, more, the intellect carries as a burden whatever it does not assimilate as nourishment. An indispensable quality of a school book, then, is its adjustment to the power of the learner. No matter how far, or how little, advanced, from the starting-point of ignorance, a child may be, the teacher and the book must go to him. And this is only saying, that he cannot proceed upon his journey from a point not yet reached, but must first go through the intermediate stages. A child must know individual objects of a species, before he can understand a name descriptive of the species itself. He must know particulars, before he can understand the relations of analogy or contrast between them ; he must be accustomed to ideas of visible and tangible extension, before it is of any use to tell him of the height of the Alps or the length of the Amazon ; he must have definite notions of weight, before he can understand the force of gravitating planets ; he must be acquainted with phenomena, before he can be instructed in the laws, which harmonize their conflicting appearances ; and he must know something of the relations of men, before he is qualified to infer the duties that spring from them.

Nor should the first lessons be simple and elementary, in regard to the subject only ; but the language of the earliest ones should be literal. All figurative or metaphorical expression is based upon the literal, and can have no intelligible existence without it. After a clear apprehension of the literal meaning of words, there is a charm in their figurative applications ; because a comparison is silently made between the figurative and the literal meanings, and the resemblance perceived, awakens a delightful emotion. And this pleasure is proportioned to the distinctness of the related ideas. But how can a child understand those figures of speech, where a part is put for the whole, or the

whole for a part, when he knows nothing either of whole or part ;—where sensible objects are put for intelligible, or animate things for inanimate, when he is wholly ignorant of the subjects, likened or contrasted ? How can there be any such thing as tautology to a child, who is unacquainted with what went before ; or how can he perceive antithesis if both extremes are invisible ? In writings, beautiful from the richness of their suggestion, the tacit reference to collateral ideas is wholly lost ; and yet it is the highest proof of a master, to interweave ideas with which pleasurable emotions have become associated. Hence, a child, put into reading lessons which are beyond his ability, not only reads with a dormant understanding, but all the faculties, productive of taste, refinement, elegance, beauty, are torpid also. The faculties being unemployed, the reading, which otherwise would have been a pleasure, becomes irksome and repulsive. There is another pernicious consequence, inseparable from the practice of depositing, in the memory of children, those general and synoptical views, which they do not understand. It leads to an opposite extreme in instruction ; for when children, whose memory only has been cultivated, are really to be taught any subject with thoroughness, and for practical application ; it then becomes necessary to simplify and degrade it to the level of their feeble apprehension. But why cannot the faculties be strengthened by exercise, so that, in process of time, they can master more difficult subjects, as well as to degrade subjects to the level of weak faculties ?

In communicating the elements of knowledge to children, there is, at first, but little danger of being too minute and particular. Expansion, explanation, illustration, circumlocution,—all are necessary. But, as the child advances, less diffuseness is requisite. The prolix becomes concise. Different and more comprehensive words are used, or the same, in an enlarged signification. What was pulverized and examined in atoms, is now collected and handled in masses. Care, however, is to be taken at every step, in the first place, that what is presented to the learner should demand a conscious effort on his part, for without such an effort, there will be no increase of strength ; and, in the next place, that what is presented should be attainable by an effort, for without success, discouragement and despair will ensue. School books, however, are made for classes and not for indi-

vidual minds, and hence the best books will be more precisely adapted to some minds than to others. This difference, it is the duty of the teacher to equalize, by giving more copious explanations to the dull and unintelligent, and by tasking the strong and apprehensive with more difficult questions, connected with the text. Every sentence will have related ideas of cause and effect, of what is antecedent, consequent or collateral, which may be explored to the precise extent, indicated by different abilities. The old Balearic islanders of the Mediterranean, famed among the ancients for being the best bowmen and slingsmen, in the then known world, had in this respect a true idea of Education. They placed the food of their children upon the branches of the trees, at different heights from the ground, according to age and proficiency, and when the children had dislodged it, by bow or sling, they had their meals, but not before.

Tested by this criterion, are not many of the reading books in our schools, too elevated for the scholars? It seems generally to have been the object of the compilers of these books, to cull the most profound and brilliant passages, contained in a language, in which the highest efforts of learning, talent and genius have been embalmed. Had there been a rivalry, like that at the ancient Olympic games, where emulous nations, instead of individuals, had entered the classic lists, as competitors for renown, and our fame as a people had been staked upon our eloquent, school book miscellanies, we should have questioned the integrity of the umpire, had we not won the prize. Certainly from no ancient, probably from no other modern language, could such a selection of literary excellencies be made, as some of them exhibit;—demonstrative arguments on the most abstruse and recondite subjects, tasking the acuteness of practised logicians, and appreciable only by them;—brilliant passages of parliamentary debates, whose force would be irresistible, provided only that one were familiar with all contemporary institutions and events;—scenes from dramas, beautiful if understood, but unintelligible without an acquaintance with heathen mythology;—wit, poetry, eloquence, whose shafts, to the vision of educated minds, are quick and resplendent as lightning, but giving out to the ignorant, only an empty rumbling of words;—every thing, in fine, may be found in their pages, which can make them, at once, worthy the highest admiration of the learned,

and wholly unintelligible to children. If I may recur to the illustration of the Balearic islanders, given above ; the prize of the young slingers and archers is invaluable, if it can be obtained, but it is placed so high as to be wholly invisible. Children can advance from the proposition, that one and one make two, up to the measurement of planetary distances, but an immense number of steps must be taken in traversing the intermediate spaces. And it is only by a similar gradation and progressiveness, that a child can advance from understanding such nursery talk, as “the ball rolls,” “the dog barks,” “the horse trots,” until his mind acquires such compass and velocity of movement, that when he reads the brief declaration of the Psalmist, “Oh, Lord, how manifold are thy works ; in wisdom hast thou made them all !” his swift conception will sweep over all known parts of the universe in an instant, and return glowing with adoration of their Creator.

Using incomprehensible reading books draws after it the inevitable consequence of bad reading. Except the mental part is well done, it is impossible to read with any rhetorical grace or propriety. Could any one, ignorant of the Latin and French languages, expect to read a Latin or French author with just modulations and expressiveness of voice, at the first or at the ten thousandth trial ? And it matters not what language we read, provided the mechanical process is animated by no vitality of thought. Something, doubtless, depends upon flexibility and pliancy of physical organs ; but should they be ever so perfect, a fitting style of delivery is born of intelligence and feeling only, and can have no other parentage. Without these, there will be no perception of impropriety, though epitaphs and epigrams are read in the same manner. If the pieces of which the reading books consist, are among the most difficult in the English language, is it not absurd to expect, that the least instructed portion of the people, speaking English—the very children—should be able to display their meaning with grace and fulness ? To encourage children to strive after a supposed natural way of expressing emotions and sentiments they do not feel, encourages deception, not sincerity ; a discord, not a harmony between the movements of mind and tongue. No rules, in regard to reading, can supply a defect in understanding what is read. Rhetorical directions, though they should equal

the variety of musical notation, would not suffice to indicate the slower or swifter enunciation of emphatic or unemphatic words, or those modulations of the human voice, which are said to amount to hundreds of thousands in number. Inflections and the rate of utterance, are too volatile and changeful to be guided by rules ; though perceptible, they are indescribable. All good reading of dramatic or poetic works springs from emotion. Nothing but the greatest histrionic power, can express an emotion without feeling it. But, once let the subject-matter of the reading lesson be understood, and, almost universally, nature will supply the proper variations of voice. A child makes no mistakes in talking, for the simple reason, that he never undertakes to say what he does not understand. Nature is the only master of rhetoric on the play-ground. Yet there, earnestness gives a quick and emphatic utterance ; the voice is roughened by combative feelings ; it is softened by all joyous and grateful emotions, and it is projected, as by the accuracy of an engineer, to strike the ear of a distant play-fellow. Nay, so perfect are undrilled children in this matter, that if any one of a group of twenty makes a false cadence or emphasis, or utters interrogatively what he meant to affirm, a simultaneous shout proclaims an observance of the blunder ; yet, if the same group were immediately put to reading from some of our school books, their many-sounding voices would shrink from their wide compass, into a one-toned instrument ;—or, what is far worse, if they affected an expression of sentiment, they would cast it so promiscuously over the sentences as to make good taste shudder. Occasionally, in some of the reading-books, there are lessons which the scholars fully understand ; and I presume it is within the observation of every person, conversant with schools, that the classes learn more from those lessons, than from the residue of the book. The moment such lessons are reached, the dull machinery quickens into life ; the moment they are passed, it becomes droning machinery again. Even the mechanical part of reading, therefore, is dependant for all its force, gracefulness and variety upon the mental.

There are other features of our reading books, too important to be unnoticed, even in a brief discussion of their merits. Two prominent characteristics are, the incompleteness of the subjects of the reading lessons, considered each by itself ; and the discordance be-

tween them, when viewed in succession. Lord Kaimes maintains, in substance, that there is an original, instinctive propensity or faculty of the mind, which demands the completion or finishing of what has been begun, and is displeased by an untimely or abrupt termination. Other metaphysicians attest the same doctrine. Whether such mental tendency be native or superinduced, its practical value can hardly be overestimated ; and whatever conduces to establish or confirm it, should be sedulously fostered. In our state of civilization, all questions have become complex. Hence, an earnest desire to learn all the facts, to consider all the principles, which rightfully go to modify conclusions, is a copious and unfailing source of practical wisdom. Error often comes, not from any mistake in our judgments, upon the premises given ; but from omitting views, as much belonging to the subject, as those which are considered. We often see men, who will develop one part of a case with signal ability, and yet are always in the wrong, because they overlook other parts, equally essential to a sound result. Thus error becomes the consequence of seeing only parts of truth. Often, the want of the hundredth part to make a whole, renders the possession of the other ninety-nine valueless. If one planet were left out of our astronomical computations, the motions of the solar system could not be explained, though all about the others were perfectly known. Children, therefore, should not only be taught, but habituated, as far as possible, to compass the subject of inquiry, to explore its less obvious parts, and, if I may so speak, to circumnavigate it ; so that their minds will be impatient of a want of completeness and thoroughness, and will resent one-sided views and half-presentations. Merely a habit of mind in a child of seeking for well-connected, well-proportioned views, would give the surest augury of a great man. Now, if there be such a tendency in the human mind, urging it to search out the totality of any subject, and rewarding success, not only with utility, but with a lively pleasure, is not the reading pupil defrauded both of the benefit and the enjoyment, by having his mind forcibly transferred, in rapid succession, from a few glimpses of one subject to as few glimpses of another ? On looking into a majority of the reading books in our schools, I believe it will be found, that they contain more separate pieces than leaves. Often, these pieces are antipodal to each other in style, treatment and

subject. There is a solemn inculcation of the doctrine of universal peace on one page, and a martial, slaughter-breathing poem on the next. I have a reading book, in which a catalogue of the names of all the books of the Old and New Testaments is followed immediately, and on the same page, by a “receipt to make good red ink.” But what is worst of all is, that the lessons, generally, have not, in any logical sense, either a beginning or an end. They are splendid passages, carved out of an eloquent oration or sermon, without premises or conclusion ;—a page of compressed thought, taken from a didactic poem, without the slightest indication of the system of doctrines embodied in the whole ;—extracts from forensic arguments, without any statement of the facts of the case, so that the imagination of the young reader is inflamed, while those faculties which determine the fitness and relevancy of the advocate’s appeals are wholly unexercised ;—forty or fifty lines of the tenderest pathos, unaccompanied by any circumstances, tending to awaken sympathy, and leaving the children to guess both at cause and consolation ;—and while no dramatist dares violate an absurd rule, that every tragedy written for the stage, shall have five acts, a single isolated scene, taken from the middle of one of them, seems to be considered a fair proportion for a child. Probably in a school of an average number of scholars, three or four of these pieces would be read at each exercise, so that, even if the pieces were intelligible by themselves, the contradictory impressions will effectually neutralize each other. Surely, if, according to Lord Kaines, there be an innate desire or propensity *to finish*, we should expect that the children would manifest it, in such cases, by desiring to have done with the book forever.

What the ancient rhetoricians said of a literary work,—that it should always have a beginning, a middle, and an end,—is more emphatically true of reading lessons for children. Each piece should have the completeness of a fable or an allegory. Were a single figure cut from the historic canvass of some master painter, and presented to us by itself, we should suffer vexation from the blankness of the mutilated part, instead of enjoying the pleasure of a perfect whole.

But, perhaps it will be said that children like variety, and therefore, a diversity of subjects is demanded. But there is a wide dis-

inction, between what is variegated and what is heterogeneous or conflicting. Quite as well may it be said, that children like continuity, not less than variety. Agencies working to a common end, elements expanding and evolving into a full and symmetrical development, present a variety more accordant to nature, than that of patchwork. An easy and gliding transition from topic to topic, is far preferable to a sudden revulsion, which seems, as it were, to arrest the mental machinery and work it backwards. Besides, all needful variety is as attainable in long pieces, as in short ones. An author may pass from grave to humorous, from description to narration, from philosophizing to moralizing, or even from prose to poetry, without shocking the mind by precipitous leaps from one subject to another.

Another mental exercise of the highest value, is not only overlooked, but rendered wholly impossible by this violent transference of the mind through a series of repugnant subjects. The true order of mental advancement is, from the primitive meaning of words to their modified meaning in particular connections, and then to a clear apprehension of the import of sentences and paragraphs. After these, come two other mental processes, which are the crowning constituents of intellectual greatness. The first process is a comparison with each other, of all the parts presented, in order to discern their agreement or repugnance, and to form a judgment of their conduciveness to a proposed result. For this purpose, the mind must summon the whole train of thought into its presence, and see for itself, whether the conclusion is authorized, to which its assent is demanded. Here the reader must see whether the part, he now reads, as compared with the preceding, is consistent or contradictory. Otherwise he may be marched and counter-marched through all regions of belief, and even be made to tread backwards in his own footsteps without knowing it. How can a juror judge of the soundness or fallacy of an advocate's argument, if he cannot reproduce it and compare its different points ;—if he cannot, if a military phrase may be used, bring up the long column of arguments and deploy them into line, so as to survey them all at a glance ? Such a habit of mind confers a wonderful superiority on its possessor ; and therefore it should be cultivated by all practicable means. Great as it is in some men, it has grown up, under favoring circumstances, from the feeblest beginnings ; and the minds of all children

may be managed so as to stifle or strengthen it. Of course, all consecutiveness of thought is dispersed by a scrap book.

I will take a few examples from a reading book, now in use in some of our schools. A most humorous disquisition "On the head-dress of ladies," is immediately followed by another disquisition "On a future state of eternal happiness or perdition;" a passage from Milton's "Creation of the world," leads on "The facetious history of John Gilpin;" Thompson's "Hymn to the Deity," ushers in "Merrick's chameleon;" and two minutes reading from Blair's "Sermon on the death of Christ," precedes Lord Chesterfield's "Speech on Pensions." Surely, the habit of mind, I have endeavored to describe, is here impossible. There is no continuity in the subject-matter for the mind to act on.

The preceding remarks contemplate the reader or hearer, as engaged in fixing the whole train of the author's thought in his own mind, for the purpose of comparing its different parts. But to make reading in the highest degree valuable, another mental process still is necessary. It is not enough merely to discern the agreement or disagreement of the associated parts, heard or read; but in the progress of the exercise, we ought to look to the right and left, and compare the positions of the speaker or writer with our own observation, experience and former judgment; so as to obtain new arguments for our own opinions, where there is a coincidence, and be led to re-examine them with conscientious impartiality when opposed. In this way only, can we modify and correct our own views by the help of other minds. In this way only, can we give permanence to our acquisitions; and what is rapidity in acquisition, without durability in retention? It is the absence of these two mental exercises which makes so vast a portion of the reading of our community utterly barren. Of course, only the older scholars can fairly realize this degree of intelligent reading. But after a little practice, all children are capable of reading with such an open and inquiring mind, that if any thing occurs in the lesson, which is connected with their own recent experience or observation, the two things will be immediately associated. This will grow into a habit of thinking not only of what they read, but of associating and comparing their previous knowledge upon the same subject with it; and it will be the best possible stimulant to the inventive powers. It

will also prevent them from blindly adopting whatever is communicated to them by others. They will acquire such a power, at once of expanded views and of thorough investigation, that if afterwards, in the practical business of life, any plan or course of policy is presented to them, and there be a difficulty in it, they will see it ; and if there be any way of obviating that difficulty, they will see that also.

To mitigate the calamity of unintelligent reading, various inventions have been sought out ; by some of which it may have been slightly relieved, while others seem wholly illusive. Spelling books have been prepared, purporting to give synonymous words, arranged in parallel columns. On some pages, two columns, on others, three columns are found, where the words, which are placed horizontally, in regard to each other, are alleged to be synonymous. Thus single words are supposed to be defined by single words, as in the following example, which is taken from one of them :—

“ *comedy* *tragedy* *drama* ”

It is a remark of Dr. Blair, that “ hardly in any language are there two words, that convey the same idea.” Dr. Campbell, also, the author of that able work, “ *The Philosophy of Rhetoric,* ” observes, that “ there are few words in any language, (particularly such as relate to operations and feelings of the mind,) which are strictly univocal.” To teach children that any considerable number, even of the primitive words in the English language, can be reduced to doublets and triplets of synonyms ; or that there are many cases, where words can be interchangeably used, would subject them to the certainty, both of being mistaken by others, and of mistaking whatever they might hear or read ; and it would destroy the power of aptness in the selection of words, upon which all the accuracy, elegance and force of diction depend. Surely, if a large majority of the words of our language have each, one or two synonymous words, it would seem advisable for the government of the “ *Republic of Letters,* ” at once to reduce it to one half or one third of its present bulk, by discarding the superfluous parts, and thus save the young the labor of learning and the old the trouble of writing and reading a double or treble-sized vocabulary. But if, as is further observed by Dr. Blair, any person “ conversant with the propriety of the language, will always be able

to observe something, that distinguishes any two of its words," then a book would be greatly to be preferred, which should show that it has no synonyms. Even if our language furnished synonyms, and these were carefully collated, according to the above plan, it would seem quite as possible for the learner, with a little additional labor, to get two or three words, without any glimmer of meaning, as to get one. It is rarely possible to explain any word of unknown meaning by any other single word. Our most common words are susceptible, probably, of a hundred significations, according to the connexion in which they are used. Their value is constantly changing, according to the context. It is like the value of pieces upon a chess board ; the same piece, in one position, being almost worthless, in another position, commanding the game. It is this fact, which makes it such vanity and uselessness to read words, without reference to their significations.

Another method for teaching significations consists in the use of the dictionary. This is far less fallacious than the former, because no dictionary ever defines by a single word. It usually gives a number of words and short sentences, from a comparison of which, the principal idea, common to them all, can be separated from the accessory ideas, peculiar to each. Although, therefore, it is a meagre resource for a learner, it is far better than any definition, by a single inflexible word, can be. There are, however, very serious objections to this mode. Should the pupil take the words of the dictionary, in course, he would study double the number which he will have occasion to use in after-life ; and it seems a misfortune, that scholars, who do not go to school half long enough to learn what is needful, should spend half their time while there, in learning what is superfluous. Nor do dictionaries indicate what words are in reputable use, what are more appropriate to poetical, what to prose writings, and so forth. But should the words to be studied or omitted be marked for the learner, or a dictionary be prepared, containing the former only ; still an insuperable objection would remain, in consequence of the order, or rather the entire want of order, in regard to meaning, in which the words are presented. For, while the words come alphabetically, the ideas come chaotically. The learner is whirled backwards and forwards, carried through time and space, presented with matter and

mind, principal and incident, action and passion, all in a single column. Nothing can be conceived more heterogeneous, than the ideas necessarily resulting from an alphabetical arrangement of the words ; and were children to be drilled at much length on such exercises, it would argue great soundness of mind, if their intellects were not a little unsettled. Suppose a professor in the natural sciences, instead of teaching his sciences in a natural order, should go into the fields, and halting any where, at random, should take a spot no larger than is sufficient for the growth of a single blade of grass, and should proceed to lecture upon whatever was found at that single point. He would be obliged to run over the subjects of geology, mineralogy, chemistry, botany, and perhaps entomology, without leaving the spot. Nor would this be a course half so devious and erratic, as that of studying definitions, through the columns of a dictionary.

Another device to fill vacuity by pouring in vacuity, is this ;—a book is prepared, in which the spelling and reading lessons alternate. First come a few columns of words, and then a page of apothegms and synopses of universal truths, not occupying, perhaps, more than a line each ; some one word in the spelling columns being incorporated into each of these short sentences. The force of the reasons against the preceding mode is but little abated, when applied to this. This motley company of sentences repels all interest on the part of the learner. Topics, more alien from each other and more bewildering to the mind, could not be found, if one were to stick a pin through all the leaves of a book and then to read continuously all the sentences, through which the puncture was made. As many-colored and diverse-shaped objects, flitting swiftly before the eye, will make no stable impression upon the retina ; so a multitude of incongruous ideas and feelings, trooping hurriedly before the mental vision, can leave no enduring traces of outline, aspect or quality upon the mind. A rapid succession of discordant images will inflict distraction upon the mind of an adult ;—how much more certain are they to do it, upon that of a child ? The power of passing abruptly from one subject of thought to another, without mental disturbance, requires long habit and familiarity with the matters presented. Children can have neither.

But I will not occupy further time in exposing empirical plans for

acquiring a ready and apposite use of our language. After experimenting with every scheme, I believe we shall be driven back to a single resource ;—and not reluctantly, for that resource is sure and adequate. Language is to be learned, where it is used ; as skill in handling the implements of an art, is acquired by practising with them upon their appropriate objects. It is to be learned by conversation, and by the daily reading of such books, as with the aid of free questioning on the part of the pupil, and full explanations on that of the teacher, can be thoroughly mastered. The ideas of the learner are to be brought out and set, objectively, before his own eyes, like a picture. Any error can then be pointed out. The boundary line can be traced, between his knowledge and his ignorance. A pupil may recite a lesson with literal correctness, respecting the boundaries of the different States in the Union ; and it may be impossible for the teacher to determine, whether this is done by a mental reference to divisional lines and adjacent territory, or whether it is done by remembering the words, as they stand in the geography. But if the pupil can delineate a correct map of the United States, on a blackboard, it is then certain, that he has the prototype of it in his mind. So if the pupil applies language to something, known to both parties, the teacher can then perceive, *whether the language is adjusted to the thing* ; and, if it is not, he can ascertain whether the error arises from a misconception of the thing, or from an unskilful use of words in describing it. Oral instruction, therefore, to some extent, respecting known objects and such as can be graphically described, should precede reading ; and should accompany it ever afterwards, though, perhaps, with diminishing frequency. Early practice, in noting the real distinctions in the qualities of sensible substances, will give accuracy to language ; and when the child passes from present and sensible objects to unseen or mental ones, a previously acquired accuracy of language will impart accuracy to the new ideas. Hence, too, the scenes of the first reading lessons should be laid in the household, the play-ground, among the occupations of men, and the surrounding objects of nature, so that the child's notions can be rectified at every step in the progress. This rectification will be impossible, if the notions of the pupil can be brought to no common and intelligible standard. We must believe, too, that the Creator of the human mind, and of the material

world in which it is placed, established a harmony and correspondence between them ; so that the objects of nature are pre-adapted to the development of the intellect, as the tempers, dispositions and manners of the family are to develop the moral powers. The objects of natural history,—descriptions of beasts, birds, fishes, insects, trees, flowers, and unorganized substances, should form the subjects of the earliest intellectual lessons. A knowledge of these facts lays the foundation for a knowledge of the principles or sciences, which respectively grow out of them. We are physically connected with earth, air, water, light ; we are dependant, for health and comfort, upon a knowledge of their properties and uses, and many of the vastest structures of the intellect are reared upon these foundations. Lineally related to these is the whole family of the useful arts. These classes of subjects are not only best calculated to foster the early growth of the perceptive, inventive and reasoning powers ; but the language appropriate to them excludes vagueness and ambiguity, and compels every mistake to betray itself. Voyages and travels, also, accompanied as they always should be, with geography, present definite materials, both for thought and expression. Just as early as a habit of exactness is formed in using words to express things, all the subjects of consciousness may be successively brought within the domain of instruction. The ideal world can then be entered, as it were with a lamp in the hand, and all its wonders portrayed. Affection, justice, veracity, impartiality, self-sacrifice, love to man and love to God,—all carried out into action,—can be illustrated by examples, after the learner has acquired a medium, through which he can see all the circumstances, which make deeds magnanimous, heroic, god-like. Here the biography of great and good men belongs. This is a department of literature, equally vivifying to the intellect and the morals ;—bestowing useful knowledge and inspiring noble sentiments. And much of the language appropriate to it almost belongs to another dialect ;—fervid, electric, radiant. At the earliest practicable period, let composition or translation be commenced. By composition, I do not mean an essay “On Friendship,” or “On Honor ;” nor that a young Miss of twelve years should write a homily “On the duties of a Queen,” or a lad, impatient of his nonage, “On the shortness of human life ;”—but that the learner should apply, on familiar

vestigation of the sublime laws of the material universe, and the operation of its beneficent physical agencies.

Another large class of our citizens scarcely consult any oracle, either for their literature or for their politics, but the daily newspaper. Wholly ignorant of the language, in which argumentative and profound disquisitions, on subjects of policy or questions of government are carried on ; why should we wonder, that so many of them feel less interest in dispassionate, instructive appeals to reason, than in the savage idioms of party warfare ? The states of mind thus excited are wholly incompatible with discriminating judgment, with impartiality, with that deliberation and truth-seeking anxiety, which are indispensable to the formation of correct opinions and which lead to conduct, worthy of free citizens. I would not attribute too efficient an agency to this cause, but if it only tends to such disastrous results, by the slightest approximation, it furnishes another powerful argument for a thorough reform in our practice.

During the first year of my officiating as Secretary of the Board, very numerous applications were made to me, from almost all parts of the State, to recommend class books for the schools, or to state what books were considered best by the Board, or by myself. As the Board had adopted no order, nor were invested with any express authority, by law, upon the subject, I uniformly abstained even from expressing any opinion ; but for the purpose of learning, authentically, what were the prevalent views of the community, I inserted, in my last circular to the school committees, the following question : “ Would it be generally acceptable to the friends of Education in your town, to have the Board of Education recommend books for the use of the Schools ? ” This gave to school committees ample opportunity to consult with the friends of Education, in their respective towns, and opened a way to obtain a full and fair representation of the wishes of the public. From this, as the principal source of information, somewhat corroborated and extended by other means, it appears, that the friends of Education, in twenty towns, containing, in the aggregate, a population of about thirty-five thousand inhabitants, declare that such a recommendation would not be acceptable. In one, containing eighteen thousand inhabitants, they say, “ we feel so well satisfied, with our own selection of books, as to have no wish,

farther than to see how far the views of different practical men agree." Ten towns wish to have the Board *recommend*, but not *prescribe*; two towns, to have the Board *recommend* and *prescribe*; and one, that the Board may be directed to *prescribe* by an act of the Legislature. It also appears, that the friends of Education in towns containing more than seven-eighths of the population of the State, are in favor of having the Board of Education *recommend* books for the use of the Schools.

The expediency of a *recommendation*, by the Board, of class books for the schools, leaving it optional with the committees to adopt such recommendation or not, is a question so exclusively within the competency of the Board, that I shall not presume to express any opinion concerning it. Considerations, for and against such recommendation, may be supposed to bear with different degrees of force, in regard to different species of books;—as geographies, grammars, and spelling or reading books. In my Report of last year, I set forth some of the very serious inconveniences, resulting from the multiplicity of books, now in use. I will here only add, that if the Board should assume the labor of examining and recommending any kind of school books, I trust they will not allow so favorable an opportunity to pass, without securing a better quality of materials and workmanship, than go to the formation of some books now in use. It is too obvious to be mentioned, that in case of a uniformity of books, they would be furnished much cheaper than at present, as measures would, of course, be taken, to prevent monopoly.

As the law now stands, in order to entitle a town to receive its distributive share of the income of the School Fund, the committee must make oath, that the town, "at their last annual meeting, raised the sum of _____ dollars, *to pay the wages of instructers solely.*" In preparing the last "Annual Abstract," I found this certificate the subject of frequent alteration. Although the law prescribed a certain form of oath, as a condition precedent, the school committees altered the form, and then made oath to a form unknown to the law. The reason was, that very few towns raised money "to pay the wages of instructers solely," and, therefore, though they had raised a sufficient sum for schools to entitle them to a share of the fund, they

had not raised it in the particular form, contemplated by the certificate.

I endeavored this year to ascertain the form of the vote, adopted by the towns, in raising school money. Owing, however, to a non-compliance on the part of many school committees, with my request, I have obtained a copy of the form used the current year, from only one hundred and ten towns. But six of these one hundred and ten towns raised money "to pay the wages of instructors solely." In almost all the others, the terms used are "for the support of schools," or some equivalent expression. It is very desirable, that the certificate should be conformed to the vote, or the vote to the certificate.

In my Report of last year, I exposed the alarming deficiency of moral and religious instruction, then found to exist in our schools. That deficiency, in regard to religious instruction, could only be explained by supposing, that school committees, whose duty it is to prescribe school books, had not found any books at once, expository of the doctrines of revealed religion, and, also free from such advocacy of the "tenets" of particular sects of Christians, as brought them, in their opinion, within the scope of the legal prohibition. And hence, they felt obliged to exclude books, which, but for their denominational views, they would have been glad to introduce. No candid mind could ever, for a moment, accept this as evidence of an indifference to moral and religious instruction in the schools; but only as proof that proper manuals had not been found, by which the great object of moral and religious instruction could be secured, without any infringement of the statutory regulation. The time for the committees to make another return, not having yet arrived, it is impossible to say, whether books, having the above object in view, have been since introduced into any more of the schools. I am happy, however, to say, that a knowledge of that deficiency, then for the first time exposed to the public, has turned the attention of some of the friends of Education to the subject, and that efforts are now making to supply the desideratum. Of course, I shall not be here understood, as referring to the Scriptures, as it is well known, that they are used in almost all the schools, either as a devotional or as a reading book.

I close this second Report, inspired by opposite reasons to renewed exertions in this sacred cause;—being not more encouraged by what has already been accomplished, than stimulated by what remains to be done.

HORACE MANN,

Secretary of the Board of Education.

BOSTON, Dec. 26, 1838.

